

Rusk Christian Reformed Church Seventy-Five Years, 1897-1972

There were eleven families in the Rusk community that desired to form their own church due to the poor conditions of the roads which made traveling to Allendale or Borculo for services on Sunday very difficult so they wanted to organize their own church.

Repeated efforts to organize a church under the direction of the Allendale Consistory and Classis Grand Rapids West were made but failed. They turned to the Classis Holland and on 17 February 1897 the Classis Holland recognized the need of the community and a mission station was begun for a half year with the understanding that it would be overseen by both the Classis Holland and the Classis Grand Rapids West. The families worked diligently to convince the investigating ministers that they should be an independent congregation. Their efforts were convincing and on 12 May 1897 Rev. S. Groen spoke in favor of the congregation with the Classical meeting of 11 August 1897 giving the final approval.

The Rusk Church was composed of 70 souls: 7 families from Allendale and 4 families from Borculo. These were the families of: W. Calsbeek, H. Coelingh, L. DeJonge, L. DeJonge, M. DeJonge, J. Oosterbaan, S. Sipkema, A. Styf, Sr., D. Terpstra, D. Wiersma, and H. Wieten.

Within four years the congregation had doubled in membership and the Consistory was enlarged from four to seven members. At the same time the horse barns were enlarged. In 1902 the congregation incorporated and purchased the 40 acre farm on which the Church building and parsonage were built and an area of the property was set aside for a cemetery.

In 1903 the congregation asked permission to call a minister and to receive a subsidy of \$200.00 and both requests were granted. Rev. Drost, Rev. Veldkamp and Rev. Vander Heide were placed on trio, but none of these men were called, because it was decided to build a new parsonage first.

In the summer of 1903 a candidate, Lambert Ypma, worked with the church. Many difficulties were encountered and poverty seemed to be the biggest hurdle in the church development. Our first ministers were paid partially with produce from the fields, and debts were paid off with the returns of certain dedicated fields.

In 1904 Rev. H. Huizingh became Rusk's first minister. He did much to tide the church over the difficult times. Shortly after his arrival a new building, thirty-six by sixty building was constructed to replace the old thirty by thirty structure which stood northeast of our present church facing north on Pierce Street. The original building was used until the new church was completed and then it was moved across 92nd Street to the southwest corner and made into a grocery store. This store was owned by a Mr. Stiegenga. The present home of Mrs. James Roon was the Rusk Post Office and was run by a Mr. Velsey. Later, times were looking better in Rusk and another grocery store was

opened by a Mr. Stuveer, on the northwest corner of 92nd and Pierce approximately where the Harv Koetje home now stands. The second church building which was erected served the congregation until February of 1968. In the fall of 1908, Rev. Huizingh accepted a call to Hull, North Dakota.

After only a few months, Rev. W. Kole came to Rusk from Harvey, Iowa. Being a man of great talent and zeal for God's cause, his six years of labor in Rusk did much for the growth and development of the church. At this time an organ was purchased; one of the old "Reed" style. Rev. Cole left Rusk church the summer of 1914.

After two years of vacancy, God called Rev. J. Robbert to serve at Rusk. During his ministry a special building was built for a Consistory Room, a portion of the church property was purchased by the late Dr. Peter Wassenaar. In 1918 Rev. Robbert was forced to leave the ministry due to ill health.

With the coming of Rev. J. Bouwsma, the church experienced a new era of prosperity. The parsonage and church building were remodeled, a new organ was purchased, and the church had become self-supporting and would no longer need the subsidy. Rev. Bouwsma began using English in some catechism classes and an occasional afternoon service.

In 1921 Rev. D. Jonker undertook the many tasks begun by Rev. Bouwsma. A step forward was the introduction of two English services a month. Rev. Jonker served until 1926, when he joined the Protestant Reformed denomination.

Rev. J. Medendorp helped to heal the wounded church. During his tenure the congregation began to hold as many English services as Dutch services.

Rev. W. VandeKieft came to serve in 1930. While here, he was struck with tuberculosis and was in Bethesda Hospital two different times. This time of trial taught the congregation brotherly love, care, patience and kindness. During this time the chapel was connected to the church, the church yard was landscaped, and electricity was brought into the parsonage. The old pipe organ from the Graafschaap Christian Reformed Church was purchased. Dutch services were reduced to two times a month.

The History of the 1968 Church Fire

On Saturday evening, 10 February 1968, our old church building burned to the ground. All that remained was a small chapel. What has stood for almost sixty-five years as the place of worship for our congregation was leveled to the ground within an hour's time. Rev. William Holleman was the pastor during this time.

The reality of the fire was almost unbelievable. Best estimates are that the fire started from a defective chimney. Neighbors scrambled to salvage a few bits and pieces. Aside from some pew Bibles, song books, pulpit furniture, folding chairs, a piano, and a few miscellaneous items, all of the contents were destroyed.

The Lord had spoken to us in fire. What could we say, but that the Lord had given, and the Lord had taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

On the Sunday afternoon following the fire, the congregation met at the Borculo Christian Reformed Church for a prayer service. They decided to conduct worship services at the Borculo Community Center.

Construction on the new church began with ground breaking ceremony on 15 July 1968 and the congregation worshipped in their new sanctuary on Good Friday, 1969.