

History of  
The First Baptist Church  
of Ionia

From  
1833 - Present

by  
Nettie Krainbrink

Ada DeBoer

## Roster of Pastors

From June 1834 to 1837, the Church was under the pastoral care of Home Missionaries.

Reverend A.C. Sangster	1837 - 1840
Reverend H.D. Buttolph	1840 - 1845
Reverend Alfred Cornell	1845 - 1863
Reverend E.H. Morrison	1863 - 1865
Reverend Alfred Cornell	1865 - 1867
Reverend Levi Parmely	1868 - 1872
Reverend Jonathon Rowley	1873 - 1874
Reverend E.O. Taylor	1874 - 1876
Reverend John Donnelly	1877 - 1882
Reverend D. VanAlstine	1882 - 1886
Reverend T.S. McCall	1886 - 1888
Reverend J.J. Phelps	1889 - 1893
Reverend F.O. Dickey	1893 - 1896
Reverend E.M. Jeffers	1896 - 1899
Reverend D.L. Martin	1900 - 1904
Reverend E.E. Branch	1905 - 1922
Reverend Wm. T. Woodhouse	1922 - 1924
Reverend Alfred Trenerry	1924 - 1928
Reverend F.J. Fitch	1929 - 1936
Reverend George Woolcock	1936 - 1945
Reverend W.L. Cruthers	1945 - 1947
Reverend J. Lee Lewis	1947 - 1950
Reverend W.W. Pixley	1950 - 1956
Reverend A.P. Miller (Died 10/9/86)	1956 - 1960
Reverend John W. Tennyson (Died 5/10/88)	1961 - 1966
Reverend Lowell Young	1966 - 1969
Reverend Gilbert R. Kohler	1970 - 1973
Reverend Roy A. Pitts	1973 - 2/1982
Reverend Elmer Katterjohn (Died 3/7/90)	2/1982 - 10/1982 (interim)
Reverend Mark Bouchard	10/1982 - 10/1983
Reverend Chester Tanase	12/1983 - 2/1985 (interim)
Reverend Timothy A. Gillette	2/1985 - 7/1988
Reverend Chester Tanase	8/1988 - 7/1989
Reverend James Bennett	7/1989 - 2009

The First Baptist Church in Ionia has the distinction of being the first Protestant organization in this section of our state. On May 28, 1833, a group of sixty-three people came here from Herkimer County, New York. They settled on land purchased from the government the previous year by Samuel Dexter. This was a wilderness where the Indians held undisputed possession. These were a God loving people as was evidenced by the steps taken soon after their arrival to form a religious organization.

Ionia was then called Washington Center, a name given to the settlement by the Honorable Samuel Dexter, its founder. On June 24th, 1834, a meeting was held in the home of Mr. Erastus Yeomans. Elder Loomis, an agent for the American Home Missionary Society, and Elder Slater, a missionary at Thomas Station, in what is now Grand Rapids, were present. The home of Mr. Erastus Yeomans was located on West Main Street in the general area of what is now Yeomans Street.

At this meeting six persons, Samuel Dexter and his wife Anna, along with Erastus Yeomans and his wife, Phoebe, and Alfred Cornell and his wife Nancy, united in a conference. On August 23rd of the same year Elder Loomis again visited here with Caleb Eldred, a member of the church in Comstalk, in Kalamazoo County. After a sermon and discussion, it was voted that this conference should ask recognition as a church. It was at this time that the permanent organization was effected, the Charter Members being the six who united in the conference.

Since this was two years before Michigan had attained statehood it was at a time when wild animals were yet plentiful along Grand River and Indians dwelled in great numbers. A trip to Detroit, by oxteam, required a mere fourteen days from Ionia. It was in 1833 that Andrew Jackson made the first Presidential trip ever made on a railroad, and during this year our Church had its origin. Since then our Church has been in continuous active existence. It was at this meeting that Benjamin B. Barber was received by letter and Dr. William B. Lincoln was our first candidate for baptism. Dr. Lincoln was the first physician to practice in Ionia, as well as its first school teacher. He also built and occupied the first frame house in Ionia.

The following day, on August 24th, a service was conducted with Elder Loomis preaching, and during an intermission the congregation proceeded to the Grand River where the solemn rite of baptism was administered. After Dr. Lincoln was chosen as the first Church clerk. Church records show the relatives and descendants of the charter members followed in rapid succession in church membership.

One of the articles of faith drawn up by the new organization was that "The government of the Church be vested in the hands of the male members".

Our Church is indebted to this same Samuel Dexter for the land upon which the present building stands. It was originally a plot eight rods square, at the corner of Main and Norvell Streets. The deed of the property is still in existence and bears the signatures of Mr. and Mrs. Dexter. It is interesting to note that Samuel Dexter was a direct descendant of Roger Williams, founder of the First Baptist Church in America, at Providence, Rhode Island.

Meetings of our early Church were held in the homes of Mr. Erastus Yeomans and others. They were later held at the school house which was in existence at that time on West Main Street. Baptism was solemnized in the waters of Grand River. In February 1837, Candace Dexter, the mother of Samuel Dexter, was received as a member. She was seventy-three, the oldest of the original group from New York.

For nearly three years the Church had no pastor, but under the guidance of Mr. Alfred Cornell it flourished. In late 1837, Reverend A.C. Sangster was engaged as the first pastor at a salary of \$300 per annum. He remained for two years.

In August 1840, Mr. H.D. Büttolph preached in the schoolhouse where the church met and it was voted to ask his home Church in Troy, in Oakland County, to ordain him so that he might become pastor of the Ionia Church. He arrived in October of that year and continued his pastorate until 1845. What the salary of the pastor at that time might have been is not recorded, but on August 2nd, 1845, it was voted to tax each male member 12½¢ and each of the female members 6¢ per month for the support of the Gospel. A committee was appointed to collect the same. During the pastorate of Reverend Büttolph, the Church was represented at the Shiawasse

Association, at its meeting in Perry, Michigan. Letters and reports were read. The next year the Grand River Association came into being.

About this time Mr. John VanVleck reported that residents in the vicinity of North Plains were wanting religious services and he asked for a license to preach. This was granted September 1, 1843. On June 1, 1845, he was ordained to the ministry and became the organizer and the first pastor of the Palo Church. Reverend VanVleck was the great-uncle to Mr. Leo VanVleck, now deceased.

Reverend Alfred Cornell, son of the charter member Cornell, became pastor here in 1845, and remained for seventeen years. It was during his pastorate that our First Baptist Church building was erected. It was probably in the summer of 1846 and was erected just east of where the present building stands.

In October 1864, it was decided to rent the pews in the new building, the income of which was to be applied to the finishing of the interior. Rentals ranged from \$1.00 to \$5.00 per year. Each person who had taken a pew was to give their note, payable in grain or its equivalent. It was also voted at this time to raise money by a committee whose duty it was to "Search the Tax Rolls" and levy a tax upon each member residing near enough to enjoy the privileges of church meetings, according to the amount of property assessed to each one said tax roll.

Covenant meetings were held on the Saturday afternoons preceding the first meeting of each month. The clerk kept a record of all absentees from Church services and at each Covenant meeting the clerk informed those present of all absentees and they were required to "render satisfactory excuse or be admonished for neglect of religious duty". The Church was to investigate all absentees after a second offence.

Reverend E.H. Morrison, a graduate of Colgate University, came to our Church as its pastor in 1863, remaining for two years at a salary of \$600 per annum. In 1865, Reverend Alfred Cornell returned for an additional two years, making nineteen years that he served our Church.

Reverend Levi Parmely filled the pulpit for us from 1868 until 1872. Early in his pastorate, on June 22, 1868, it voted to construct a new edifice as the old frame building was found to be inadequate for the work of the Church. It was badly in need of repairs, and the membership had increased.

Mr. Orry Waterbury Sr., father of Miss Della Waterbury and the grandfather of our own Stanley Powell, was requested to submit an estimate, at no less than \$10,000. After considerable discussion and numerous meetings of the Church membership it was voted to commission Mr. Waterbury to build the new Church. It was like the present structure except for the small tower on the Southeast corner and the entrance, which was added later. The old frame building which had served the church congregation as a meeting place since 1845 was moved to a lot at the corner of West Main Street, and Jackson Street, and subsequently put to use as a work shop by Mr. Waterbury. It was later destroyed by fire. Reverend Parmely preached the dedication sermon on January 7, 1872.

Pastor from 1873 until 1874 was Jonathan Rowley and he was followed by Reverend E.O. Taylor, who was with us for two years.

Another graduate from Colgate University, Reverend John Donnilly came to our Church in 1877 and remained for five years. He preceded the Reverend D. VanAlstyne, whose pastorate began in 1882 and lasted for four years.

Reverend T.S. McCall became the pastor in 1886, and remained for two years. He was followed by Reverend J.J. Phelps in 1889, who stayed for four years also. In 1893, Reverend F.O. Dickey served at the lectern, leaving after three years of service.

A pipe organ was installed in 1892 and in June 1895 it was voted to hire an organ pumper at a salary of 50¢ a Sunday.

Reverend E.M. Jeffers was the pastor from 1896 until 1899 and in 1900 Reverend D.L. Martin occupied the pulpit.

Beginning in 1905, Reverend E.E. Branch entered a pastorate here which was to continue for seventeen years. During this time many alterations were made to the structure of our Church. The balcony was installed in the auditorium in 1906; there were some improvements made in the basement at the same time. In 1913

hardwood floors were laid in the auditorium. In September of 1917 new stained glass windows were placed, a gift of the Emma Arnold estate. The windows grace our auditorium and foyer yet today.

January 1919 brought partial destruction to the Church foyer and considerable water damage to the auditorium. The Board of Trustees with John C. Beattie as the chairman, had all damages repaired and the building put into better condition than before the fire, with the money received from the insurance benefits. The painted murals on each side of the organ were given by the construction firm who repaired the damaged portions of the Church. During the interim, Church services were held in the courthouse.

In 1919, too, a motor was purchased for the pipe organ. Reverend Branch left us and on March 3, 1948 he passed away at the Masonic Home in Alma.

Reverend W.T. Woodhouse assumed his place in the pulpit on August 6, 1922. A year later, in 1923, the Brotherhood Room was added, a modern kitchen installed, the basement remodelled and the parsonage on East Main Street was purchased. The pastorate of Reverend Woodhouse was a happy one, but due to illness it was severed in two years. His resignation was regretfully accepted by the Church. Reverend and Mrs. Woodhouse celebrated their golden anniversary on November 16, 1937 at their home in Corruna, and three months later, on February 18, 1938 the Reverend Woodhouse passed away.

Reverend Alfred Trenary was our pastor four years, having come here in 1924. During this period it became necessary to put a new roof on the Church building. Several donations were accepted towards this, and later a mortgage was placed on the parsonage to pay for the balance of indebtedness.

Successor to Reverend Trenary was Reverend F.J. Fitch, another Colgate graduate who came to us in March of 1929. It was while he was pastor that we celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of our Church in June of 1934. This was a most outstanding event in the annals of our Church. Four different observances were included in the Centennial occasion. A banquet on June 29th, Historical Night on June 22nd, an appropriate service in the morning and another in the evening on Centennial Sunday, June 26th.

Our Church was incorporated on October 5, 1936, and on March 1, 1937 Reverend Fitch accepted a call to another Church. Reverend Charles Morse supplied the pulpit for the next three months, adding several by baptism to the membership roster.

June 1, 1936, Reverend George Woolcock became our pastor. He was here for nine years and while he was our spiritual leader there were more accomplishments. An outside bulletin board was presented by the Dorcas Society and dedicated on March 7, 1934. Redecorating took place in the auditorium and floors were refinished. A new ceiling was applied and the pipe organ was completely overhauled. The final payment was made on the mortgage and at the Adjourned Annual meeting a historical account of the mortgage was rendered by Mr. Herbert Powell. There was a service of thanksgiving after which Mrs. Flora Freeman was given the honor of burning the mortgage.

The above mentioned improvements involved an amount approximately \$3600, and when finished, were paid for entirely by members and friends of the Church. Much of the credit for the success of the project accrues to Mrs. Margaret Darling, Chairman of the Finance Committee, whose tireless efforts ensured the completion of the plan. At this time also the electric cross over the organ, the offering plates and settees as well as other gifts were made, many of them in memory of deceased members.

During the alterations services were conducted in the basement of the Church.

Reverend Woolcock passed away on September 9, 1951 at Gregory, Michigan. Mrs. Woolcock has since returned to Ionia, making it her home.

Reverend W.L. Cruthers led the Church from August 1945 until October 1947. In these two years repairs were made at the parsonage, including a completely remodelled bathroom with all new fixtures and floor coverings.

Dr. J. Lee Lewis filled the pulpit from October 1947 to August 1950. On June 24, 1949, the Church celebrated the 115th year of its existence. A banquet and program on June 24th marked the occasion and the following Sunday Dr. R.T. Andem was guest speaker.

This brings us to the pastorate of Reverend W.W. Pixley, who



came to be the pastor in October, 1950. During the years he occupied the pulpit two modern rest rooms, a Sunday School class room and a newly remodelled kitchen were given to the Church by Mr. and Mrs. Hiram Darling as a "Living memorial".

An incinerator and two new gas ranges were given by the CCW class and in 1953 gas heat was installed in the Church.

The Communion Table from which is served the sacred Communion to our congregation, was presented by the family of Francis Whitesides, in his memory. The Cross and electric candle sticks which add so much to the dignity of the services were placed by the sister and many friends of Nina Underwood who was a member of our choir for so many years. New cushions for the pews were selected and put on, new tables for the dining room and dividing screens for the various Sunday School classes were purchased in 1956.

A thoughtful gift in the nature of the pedestal and a guest register to occupy it were provided by Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Wheeler.

In 1956, on December 1st, Reverend Alfred Miller came to our Church as its pastor, Reverend Pixley having accepted a call to another Church in 1956.

In 1957, an automatic oil furnace, which was later converted to gas heat was installed in the parsonage. It was decided to change hymnals in 1958 and they were purchased and put into use.

During the summer and fall of 1958, walls and ceiling of the auditorium, foyer, hall and entrance were painted. The floors were varnished, new carpeting was laid in the foyer, Church pulpit, isles and the choir loft. New commercial linoleum was applied in the hall and entryway stairs.

New chairs were placed into the choir loft by the Crispin family in honor of Miss Ethel Crispin, church organist for fifty-six years. New chairs and desk graced the foyer, both given by the sons of Mrs. Bessie Craft and Mrs. Mary Fate in their memory. New heavy oak doors also purchased from a memorial bequest, were hung and the old carpeting was laid in the balcony. The pew cushions were also recovered.

Re-dedication services were held on Sunday, November 2, 1958 with Dr. R.W. Waigen as the principle speaker. Dr. Waigen was the Missionary Field Counselor of the Michigan Baptist Convention.

On Sunday June 29, 1959, we observed the 125th anniversary of our existence as a Church. Dr. Arthur Farrell spoke at the morning services and in the afternoon, Reverend Ralph Karney was the speaker. In the afternoon our own Stanley Powell presided. Special music was provided at both services by the choir.

Reverend Pixley extended the greetings in behalf of former pastors. Miss Della Waterbury and Mrs. Clara Yeomans were singularly honored in that they were our two oldest living members. Miss Waterbury was ninety-five and had been a member for seventy-eight years, twenty of which had been spent as our Church clerk. Mrs. Yeomans was ninety-seven and had also been a member for seventy-eight years. A brief four months later on October 2nd, Miss Waterbury passed away and was followed in death by Mrs. Yeomans a scant two months later, on December 4th.

On the evening of September 21, 1959 during an electrical storm, the Church steeple was struck by lightning, causing a large hole on the North side. One Sunday School room under the tower was damaged by the water, but fortunately the remainder of the building was left intact. When it was repaired metal strips were applied and the steeple was grounded in such a manner that a recurrence of the same nature has been highly minimized.

Reverend Miller's resignation became effective on September 7, 1960 and he was replaced by Reverend John Tennyson who assumed his duties on January 1, 1961. On March 26th of the same year Reverend Tennyson baptised thirty-three, the largest number to receive this sacrament in the history of our Church on a single date. During his first year, too, in Lansing on October 14th, there were seven of our members who had belonged to the Michigan Baptist Convention for fifty years or more, who were honored at the 125th Michigan Baptist Convention.

A cement and tile floor was laid in the north room of the basement and Fellowship hall. Masonite paneling were applied to the walls and new flush type ceiling fixtures installed. Much of this work was done by the men of the Church. (Summer of 1962).

Memorial bequests left to the Church by Mrs. Florence Patterson and Mrs. Hazel Hoag were invested in folding chairs for the Fellowship

Hall. A new pulpit was given in memory of Carolyn Signs by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Signs, and later on they added a pulpit light. Two chairs to match the pulpit were presented by the CCW class to honor Miss Ethel Crispin, their faithful leader for so many years. Another chair was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Harp. Collection plates to match the Cross and electric candle sticks were added to the pulpit area by Mrs. Fern Johnson in memory of her husband, Purl. Another gift by Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Wheeler was a loud speaker.

Reverend Tennyson left us on December 1, 1965 and on May 1, 1966 our present minister, Reverend Lowell Youngs, arrived to take over the spiritual responsibilities of the Church. On Sunday, July 17, 1966, he was installed in an impressive ceremony as minister of our Church. The Chairman of the Michigan Baptist Convention, Dr. Arthur Farrell, acted as installing chairman. Ionia's Mayor, C. Anthony Balice, extended the welcome on behalf of the city of Ionia. Representatives of the Ionia Ministerial Association were present, as well as pastors from other cities and towns in Michigan.

We cannot conclude this history without mention of many who have meant so much in the past history and life of our Church, who have gone to their reward. Emma Arnold was a Church clerk and Sunday School teacher. She left a home to the Church which was then used as a parsonage. This was later sold and under the Trusteeship of Reverend Henry Powell, the funds were used, in 1914, for the new windows in the Church and the balance placed in the Emma Arnold Endowment Fund, an interest bearing security.

Orry Waterbury Sr., a member of the Board of Trustees for many years and contractor of our present Church building, Reverend Henry Powell, a retired minister of the Gospel and brother of Herbert Powell, who was greatly interested in the welfare of the Church. He held offices of Deacon, and Trustee, and left to the Church the Powell Endowment and also the Henry Powell Trust Fund. At his request the income from the endowment fund was to be used to keep his name as a perpetual giver and contributor towards the current expense of the Church.

The Hersey's, Cornells, Allurds, Crispins (Mr. Crispin, father

of Ethel Crispin, was a former Deacon), Bloomers, (Stella and Ella), Miss Kate Benedict, Mrs. W.C. Steere, Mrs. C.A. Ireland, the Beatties (Mr. J.C. Beatte, long a Chairman of the Trustee Board), Lee, Ella, and Jessie Hutchins, (Miss Ella Hutchins in whose honor the Ella Hutchins Circle is named). On January 12, 1912, Miss Ella Hutchins was requested to act as custodian of records of the Church. This office she held until March 1927 when she moved to Ann Arbor and then turned that responsibility over to the writer. The Markles, (Mr. Markle was a former Deacon and father of Mrs. Edith Seeley), Mr. Claude Brockway, father of Mrs. Leo Edwards, long a member of the Trustee Board, for years as Chairman. Mrs. Clara Scheuer, Mr. and Mrs. E.W. Briggs, active in Sunday School work and Trustee Board, Lucy A. Cull, a devout Church and Sunday School worker, loved by all, and for many years a member of the Church choir. Mrs. Flora Freeman, teacher of the "Friendly Workers" Class, Mrs. Cora Rinker, teacher of the Ella Hutchins Circle and R.F. Whitesides, a Deacon and Trustee and Sunday School worker.

There are many others whose names we have not mentioned and who deserve much credit. We would not choose to omit one name.

During the 134 years our Church has had 26 pastors, including Reverend Youngs. Six of these are still living: Reverend F.J. Fitch, Reverend W.L. Cruthers, Reverend W.W. Pixley, Reverend A.P. Miller, Reverend John Tennyson, and our present pastor, Reverend Lowell Youngs.

Our Church stands as a memorial to the zeal and devotion of those who sought to secure for themselves and their descendents the right to worship God according to their own convictions. We enjoy a modern building in all of its beauty, free from debt because of the many devoted members who have toiled and sacrificed during the many years that have passed as well as the present. Ours is indeed a priceless heritage.

In the fall of 1966, the old parsonage on East Main Street was sold and a new one was built on Reimer Drive, at the cost of \$25,400, plus extras. This was dedicated on September 24, 1967.

A new lighted outdoor bulletin board was presented by Mrs. Winnifred Halsted and daughters in memory of Ford Halsted.

Reverend Youngs resigned as of November 30, 1969 to accept a call in Sault Ste. Marie.

Reverend Gilbert Kohler accepted our call to become our new pastor and delivered his first official sermon on February 8, 1970. On February 22nd before a large assembly of friends and co-workers, he received the charge of ministry as pastor to the congregation of the First Baptist Church of Ionia. It was administered by Reverend James Burgass of the Michigan Baptist Convention. Reverend Forbes represented the Ionia Council of Churches and Reverend Breining represented the Grand River Association in welcoming Reverend Kohler. A reception followed in Fellowship Hall.

During Reverend Kohler's pastorate the Sanctuary was cleaned and redecorated at a cost of \$6,465. In October of 1972, the centennial of our present church building was celebrated. During this celebration, on Saturday evening the Covenant Players of Encino, California presented a dramatization of religious truths, followed by refreshments in Fellowship Hall. All living former pastors were invited to join us in this celebration. Reverend Fitch, Reverend Cruthers, Reverend Miller and Reverend Tennyson attended and old friendships were renewed. On February 16th Miss Ethel Crispin died. She has served as organist and Sunday School teacher for more than 50 years. Our Church sponsored sending Jack Smith to El Salvador for two weeks to assist in building a new church. Different groups donated money toward purchasing blocks for the new church. In 1973 the church received a gift from Miss Crispin's estate that nearly paid off the parsonage indebtedness. During Reverend Kohler's pastorate, the church grew, adding several young couples to the congregation. A new Sunday School Class, The Yokefellows, was formed from this group. The choir also grew and flourished under Linda's enthusiastic direction. Reverend Kohler tendered his resignation as of October 9, 1973, having accepted a call to the First Baptist Church of Marshall. On October 9th Pastor Kohler, Linda, Karen and Brian were honored at a farewell dinner hosted by the Yokefellows and Tuxis Classes. A short program followed the dinner.

On November 4, 1973 Reverend Roy Pitts assumed his duties as our pastor. The parsonage had been cleaned and redecorated in readiness for their coming.

Under Reverend Pitts guidance the church grew spiritually and in number.

Several projects were accomplished. The outside wood trim was

scraped and repainted, and plexiglass panes were installed over the stained glass windows to protect them and act as storm windows. The men of the church spent many hours cutting and installing this material.

A new sound system was also installed.

The need for a better nursery facility and more Sunday School classroom space had often been the subject of discussion. These needs were again brought forward and after much discussion, preliminary plans by the architect, study of the church lot boundaries and a financial survey, spurred on by the gift of \$8,375.28 from the Maud Honsinger estate (1980), the church voted to proceed with phase I of a proposed three phase building program. This phase would provide two classrooms with toilet and lavatory facility, a crib room, and separate heating unit for these rooms. The ground breaking ceremony took place September 13, 1981. Local dignitaries and the president of the American Baptist Churches of Michigan were present for the event. Having gotten this project well under way, Reverend Pitts resigned, preaching his farewell sermon January 24, 1982. He retired to Manistique where he plans to engage in counseling and part time preaching. That afternoon a retirement party was held for them in Fellowship Hall.

Reverend Elmer Katterjohn of Greenville acted as interim pastor until a new pastor could be secured.

The finishing, sanding, painting and staining in the new wing was done by many members of the church, both men and women, who spent many hours in dedicated service. The old North classroom was rejuvenated and repainted by the Tuxis Class members. This will now be their permanent classroom. Everything was completed and in readiness for the dedication of the new wing. This was incorporated with the annual homecoming and was held April 25, 1982. Reverend Pitts returned from Manistique to participate in the ceremony. Others also taking part were Reverend Katterjohn, Reverend Harrington, Western Area Director, Dr. McQuaid, Executive Director of Michigan Baptist Convention, State Representative Alan Cropsy of Dewitt, also Representative, of the architect and contractors. The new wing of the church when completed had cost \$107,000. This was financed entirely by our own people. Call notes were issued to many of our members who loaned money at a low rate of interest.

After the dedication ceremony was held a planned carry in meal was served to the many visitors, guests and members.

Reverend Mark Bouchard began his pastorate October 24, 1982. An installation service was held the afternoon of November 14th with many area pastors as well as Reverend Harrington (retired) and Reverend Ivan Estle, Western Area Director, participating.

The final call note was paid off in July 1983 and the church was free of debt.

In April 1983, Kenneth Malokofsky, long time member of the church and Diaconate member died. In his memory his wife and family installed new carpeting in the Tuxis classroom, and communion offering plates. In the Sunday morning service August 28, 1983 a special dedication service was held.

The exterior of the church building was beginning to show a great need for replacement of bricks, repointing of mortar, cleaning and sealing, as well as some roof repair including some on the steeple. This project, estimated to cost not more than \$40,000 was begun in September 1983.

After an often controversial and troubled pastorate, much prayer and soul searching by many, and several meetings of consultation with Rev. Ivan Estle, our area advisor, a meeting of the official board was held to discuss the problems. Reverend Estle was present at this meeting. After much discussion it was recommended that Reverend Bouchard tender his resignation. A very generous severance pay was worked out, which included that he and his wife, Maxine, and little daughter, Amanda, occupy the parsonage with utilities paid until January 1984. Reverend Bouchard tendered his resignation October 29, 1983 to take effect immediately.

Reverend Chester Tanase acted as interim pastor from December 1983 until February 1985. Under his expert guidance we were able to carry on an effective though somewhat limited ministry.

In April 1984 we at First Baptist church were hosts to the Western Area Churches for their annual business meeting. An evening meal was served to over 100 people.

In June 1984 we celebrated the 150th Anniversary of the establishment of our church. Many hours of planning and work went into this project, and many willingly participated. We were specially grateful to Reverend and Mrs. Tanase for their advice and guidance in many ways.

The weekend of festivity began with a praise celebration on Saturday evening featuring the reading of the church history, special music by the "Grandmothers Choir", and later the cutting of the ornate birthday cake by two women of the church who had been long time members - Emily Coates Beckhorn who joined the church in 1915 and Helen Morgan Ketchum who joined in 1923. Over the years they have both been actively involved in many ways. After the cutting of the cake, refreshments were served. The children were engaged in playing old time games with Jerry Reighard supervising and the older people spent time renewing old acquaintances and in fellowship.

The Sunday morning service was preceded by a coffee hour in the narthex. During the morning worship service, many former pastors participated, including Reverend Pixley, Reverend Tennyson and Reverend Kohler. An old fashioned Sunday School was conducted by long time member, Stanley Powell. He was well qualified having served as Sunday school superintendent for more than twenty years in times past.

At 1:00 p.m. a ham and turkey dinner was served by the women of the church. This meal also included escalloped potatoes, various salads, rolls and a dessert. More than 200 people were served. The Sunday afternoon program included greetings from Ionia's Mayor, Fred Thwaites, and from the Ionia Ministerial Association by Reverend Nixon. Reminiscing was done including those who had participated in the morning service as well as Reverend Al Miller and Reverend Youngs. Our own Marian Tingley read a poem - "Our Church" that she had composed for the occasion. The eleven members who have belonged to the church fifty years or longer were honored. Congratulatory letters from The American Baptist Historical Society, The American Baptist Churches of Michigan, were shared. In all it was an enjoyable, rewarding time of fellowship. Gifts of flowers were received from several local businesses. These too added to the festivity of the occasion.

In 1984 the city of Ionia replaced the modern street lights along Main street with old fashioned light posts in keeping with the renovation of many old buildings in the downtown area. A vote of the church determined that one of these lights should also be



placed at the West side of the church. This was financed by individual donations.

Ceiling fans were installed to facilitate air circulation, as a gift from Ola Nielson as a memorial to her deceased husband.

During all this time of activity, the pulpit committee was not idle and the search for a new pastor continued. Many were contacted and interviewed, then early in 1985 Pastor Timothy Gillette was asked to meet the church as a candidate. Both the church and pastor Gillette responded favorably to this meeting and a call was issued and accepted.

The parsonage was cleaned, repaired, walls were repainted, new carpeting was installed and new linoleum was laid in the kitchen and bathrooms. Finally everything was in readiness to receive pastor Gillette and his wife, Becky. Pastor Gillette preached his first sermon as our pastor on February 17, 1985. An installation service was held March 17, 1985 and a reception was held, after the service, in Fellowship Hall.

A farewell thank you dinner was held to honor and thank Reverend and Mrs. Tanase who had so lovingly served us since December of 1983.

In the summer of 1985 the church grounds were landscaped by Horrocks Nursery. A plan of the proposed plantings was presented to the church and many families and organizations selected a particular shrub or tree to pay for. In this way much of the cost of this project was underwritten.

On February 13, 1986, a baby girl, Anna arrived to occupy the parsonage. A church wide baby shower was held for her, and many got to see her for the first time.

In the summer of 1986, new eaves troughs were installed on the church, a new blower and motor were installed for the organ, a copy machine was purchased, and a pastor's study was placed in the church, making the pastor more accessible to many.

A new constitution was written and placed in use for a trial period of one year.

On June 8, 1986 our church had a new experience as an ordination service was held for "Pastor Tim". Many different pastors participated in this very impressive service. After the service refreshments were

served in Fellowship Hall.

We were saddened by the deaths of two of our former pastors; Reverend W.L. Cruthers died on July 26, 1986. He had been a resident of the Hillside Retirement Center in Ann Arbor for the past several years. Reverend Alfred P. Miller died October 9, 1986 in Greenville. He was acting pastor of the Palo Church at the time of his death. Our sadness is for those who are left for we know these men have been called home to be with their Lord.

Nineteen eighty-six was a productive, happy year.

Nineteen eighty-seven has been a busy year, productive in various ways.

It was a time of spiritual growth and a strengthening of the faith of all who participated in our first 50 day adventure during the fifty days preceeding Easter.

The decision was made to go forward with a five part building renovation program, including installation of a new sound system, redecorating of the sanctuary, and remodelling of the kitchen. This was followed by a capital fund drive to obtain three year pledges to pay for the financial obligations that will be incurred by the project. This drive was successful. However due to some unanticipated delays the project will not be started until early 1988.

We now have three weekly Bible study and prayer groups meeting in various homes and Pine Vista where many of our elderly ladies live.

The inactive rolls have been cleaned for the first time in seventeen years.

We participated in the Grow by Caring program and completed six of our nine goals.

A total of 14 children and youth attended camp.

We were involved in community service through the food pantry and by making available the rooms in our new wing to 8-cap to be used by their Head Start program. 8-cap funded the installation of an extra door and some fireproof wall board in the hallway to bring the area up to fire code standards for area used for this purpose.

An active junior youth group was started. A planned activity and devotional time is held once a month. These children are not only having a good time but are being taught Christian service.

We can truly sense the Lord at work in our midst.

Nineteen eighty-eight was a year of change for First Baptist Church. In conjunction with the Bible study we had a series of lessons on Personal Evangelism. These were led by Reverend Gillette.

On February 19th Kristen Ruth Gillette was born so the parsonage has the privilege of having another tiny baby in residence.

The decision was made by the church membership to proceed with the renovation of the sanctuary, kitchen and furnace room also to install a new sound system all of which is estimated to cost \$90,000. This had been under consideration and investigation for several months.

In May we were saddened and a bit shocked to receive a letter of resignation from Reverend Gillette. He is to become the founder of a new American Baptist Church in Anaheim, California. His resignation is to become effective as of July 31, 1988. This letter of resignation was mailed to each member of the church. Though we hated to see him go I think most of us realized this would be much more of a challenge to a young pastor than our mainly elderly congregation in an old town.

During the sanctuary renovation and redecoration, Sunday services were held in Fellowship Hall. A service of dedication of the sanctuary after the renovation was completed was held July 17th. Following the dedication refreshments were served in Fellowship Hall.

In June the pulpit committee was activated and the search for a new pastor was started.

As soon as Reverend Gillette left the Minister-at-Large program was contacted. We were so delighted to learn that Reverend Chester Tanase had just made himself available to that program so again we were able to secure him for an interim pastor. The parsonage was readied for them with furniture from various church members secured and collected by the Diaconate.

One of the first duties Reverend Tanase was called upon to do was to conduct the funeral service for Stanley Powell. We were all saddened by Stanley's death. He had been our oldest member having been a member for 75 years. He was nine years old when he joined the church. He had at various times held many different positions in the church and was always a faithful attendant.

various camps.

The Junior youth group is still very active under the direction of Cindy Geiger and the BYF group under the leadership of Dorothy and Jim Horrocks is growing.

As we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit during the coming year we can expect a spiritual reawakening in our midst.

Nineteen ninety has proved to be an interesting, eventful year. The constitution and by-laws revision that was started while Reverend Gillette was here but never was completed, has been again reactivated and is being reevaluated and revised for presentation to the church to be voted on at a later date.

The prayer chain remains active often receiving requests for prayer for people outside our fellowship.

The tape ministry has been expanded so that tapes of the Sunday service are available for our many shut-ins. This is a service that is greatly appreciated since our congregation is composed of many elderly and infirm individuals.

We were saddened to learn of the sudden death of Reverend Elmer Katterjohn in March. He had served us as interim pastor from February to October 1982. We also lost five of our own members by death namely, Elizabeth Shattuck, Evelyn VerPorter, Winnifred Halsted, Ida Reynolds, and Kenneth Reynolds.

During the fall the parsonage was reroofed by the men of the church, even some of the ladies did their share by wielding an occasional hammer and by providing food for the hungry workers.

Two of our men replaced the louvers in the bell tower - no small task but one that badly needed doing.

The camping program remains active under the leadership of Cindy Geiger. A camping scholarship fund was established through the Lansing office by the family of Harold DeBoer in his memory.

The Annual Christmas Church Walk was sponsored this year by our church where refreshments were served at the close of the program.

There seem to be many evidences that our fellowship is slowly becoming revitalized. My prayer is that this may continue.

During 1988 we received three new members by baptism and had other erasures by death - Fern Johnson at age 100, Leona Peoples, Blanche Kendall, LeRoy Godden as well as Stanley Powell.

As so often happens under the guidance of an interim pastor, the last half of 1988 we were quite content to maintain the status quo. Two Bible studies were continued, one at the church and one at Pine Vista. Twenty children were sent to camp and the youth programs of the church were continued.

We also were saddened to learn of the death of Reverend John Tennyson. He had been our pastor from 1961 to 1966.

Nineteen eighty-nine was a time of bidding goodbye and saying hello. On July 16th we bid farewell to Reverend and Martha Tanase with a farewell potluck dinner in their honor after the morning worship service. We were grateful for the leadership and support they had given us during the year of interim between pastors.

The parsonage was then readied to welcome its new residents, Pastor Bennett, his wife Martha and their children Timothy and Natalie.

A special installation service was held on August 13th. Dr. Shaw, Executive Director of American Baptist Churches of Michigan gave the charge to the new minister as well as to the church members. Several area ministers also participated in this event. Following the installation service a reception was held in Fellowship Hall. and refreshments were served.

Since Reverend Bennett has been with us there seems to be a spiritual reawakening among many of us evidencing the active working of the Holy Spirit. Since the addition of the prayer time of sharing many are able to voice not only their own needs but the needs of others which is good. We need to share not only our needs and concerns but our praises as well.

We were happy to welcome five people to our membership but saddened by the erasures by death of three long time members, Elsie Boltz, Gladys Ketchum and Harold DeBoer as well as a more recent member Hazel Barrows.

The camping program was again actively participated in under the direction of Cindy Geiger. Nineteen of our children attended

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HISTORY  
1993

The year 1993 began with a time of searching for a unified decision of the way the Lord seems to be leading us, what it is He wants us to be doing. As a church we need to realize that no church can do everything and instead of mourning over what we can't do we need to praise God for what we are able to do as we each make ourselves and our talents available.

Some adjusting of the worship was done leaving more time for praise choruses and a time for prayer requests and praises. This time has grown to have greater participation by many.

Under the direction of and due to the efforts of Cindy Geiger to obtain and coordinate transportation, 12 children attended camp.

New hymnals were researched and purchased, Bible study and prayer meeting groups continued. Monthly family nights were also continued with various groups sharing with us.

During the year we were saddened by the deaths of several of our members, Ruth Tanner, Mildred Crawford, Gladys Hilborn, Harold Signs and our beloved Pearl Lee. They will all be sadly missed.

The trustees were also busy this year. The two furnaces heating the sanctuary failed and had to be replaced. Jack Reimer was actively involved in getting these purchased and installed. A new garage door opener was installed at the parsonage and the shower was repaired. New tables were purchased with memorial money and the old ones sold to church members wishing to buy one. The bank loan has been paid off so the building fund money can be used to pay off call notes.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HISTORY  
1994

In 1994 the worship service was studied and its length stabilized but still contained the elements of worship. In an old established church so often the need for change is hard to accept. Too often signs of growth are judged by the number of people sitting in the pews. We need to remain faithful to what we feel God is leading us to do both in good times and when things don't seem to be going as well. After much searching and wrestling with the problem the definition of success reached is as follows, "When each person who comes in contact with our church draws closer in his or her relationship to our Lord, comes closer and more open to each person within our body, and reaches out in ministry to those within the church and outside the church; success is when the Lord empowers a life, blesses it, and blesses others because of it. Success is when worship is motivated from a sincere and experiential love for each other and love for our Lord."

A time for prayer requests for our church family members and reaching beyond to friends and acquaintances and beyond has become an integral part of our worship service as well as a time to praise our God for what He has done and is doing.

The diaconate board has carried on a plan of visiting our shut-ins and also of visiting those who come to our church giving them a visitor packet and sharing Christ's love with them.

Several of the diaconate board and several other church members attended a "fishing school" in October in an effort to grow in the ability to more easily share the message of Christ and His love.

The trustee board has been actively involved taking care of things around the church that needed attention. The sound system is being worked on. The class rooms that had been used by 8Cap have been repainted and new carpeting has been installed. Jack Reimer should be thanked for all the hours of work he has spent on Pearl Lee's estate. The call notes are beginning to be paid off. Both Jack Reimer and Steve Fountain have put forth a great deal of effort in taking care of the church and the affairs of the church.

We were saddened to learn of the death of Rev. William Pixley on October 15th, but death was a release for him for he had been ill for a long time. He served our church as pastor from 1950 to 1956 as well as other churches in western Michigan. Also in 1994 Eleanor Powell, the wife of our beloved Stanley, was taken by death. Though she was never a member of our church we were closely associated with her through Stanley and the family.

Others taken by death in 1994 were Ruby Klien, Ruth Fox, Louise Mier after long illnesses. Then too we were saddened by the sudden death of James Townsend who with his wife Mavis had served many years on the diaconate board.

We see God at work in our church in many ways and we give Him the praise.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HISTORY  
1995

Focus of ministry has been on ministry to others motivated by our love for Christ and our willingness to serve Him and share Him with others. Some of the events through which this was done was by Children's Sunday, in which the children led the worship service one of the older boys, Darick Elliott even prepared and gave the message of the morning. On women's Sunday the women of the church prepared and led the worship service. The message was prepared and given by Ada DeBoer.

One Sunday the pastor was relieved of part of his duties to explain the way of salvation as shown by the scripture to the entire catacism class at St. Peter and Paul Church. Then on Men's Sunday in September the men of the church prepared and led the worship service. The message that Sunday was prepared and given by Bruce Boroff.

The Pastor was given the week after Christmas as part of his vacation. The year before the attendance on the last Sunday of the year had been so small, it was decided by the diaconate board that rather than calling in a speaker from outside to have it be a Sunday of sharing. The service was led by Bruce Boroff and Barbie Horrocks. It proved to be a blessed time of sharing what the Lord had been doing in our lives throughout the year. Many who had never spoken in church before even to request prayer for someone got up and shared blessings in their own lives. It was a blessed even sometimes emotional time, but each one went home having felt the Lord's presence, and no one complained when the service went over the allotted time.

This year four new people became members of our church by letter or experience, Phyllis Durbin, Greg and Sandy Main, and Barbara White. And at Easter time nine people were baptized Katie Haueisen, Bethany Horrocks, Casie Gorby, Christine Main, Sara Hague, Heather Haueisen, Coleen Lance, Lorraine Slocum and Maynard White. That was a joyous morning.

During the year we were also saddened by several deaths, Frieda Babcock and Greta Burns both after long confining illnesses and Eugenia Signs. But the death that shocked and touched us all most deeply was the sudden death of Tammy Heppe Thomasson, a young mother leaving two little boys without a mother. We are reminded that God works in mysterious ways His wonders to preform. Tammy's young life had been a blessing to so many. We will never know how many lives she influenced for Christ.

The trustee board was also busy during 1995. If you have visited fellowship hall recently you couldn't have missed noticing its new ceiling, more light panels and the lighter paint job to the walls and white venetian blinds. The entry way has been completely redone with paneling on the walls, new hand rails and carpeting. Table racks have also been built in. Much of the credit must be given to Steve Fountain. He has been the driving force behind the project as well as having done much of the work helped by other men of the church under his guidance.

A new copy machine was purchased, the sound system has been upgraded, and a new freezer was purchased to replace the one in the kitchen that quit functioning. Other smaller maintenance jobs were attended to both at the church and the parsonage where a new pump was installed. The church property is the same as any other property, if it isn't constantly maintained it quickly deteriorates. We are grateful to our concerned board of trustees.

May the Lord continue to help us grow spiritually during the coming year.