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HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN PONTIAC, MICHIGAN
by Argyll C. Allen

On a meeting date of October 12, 1920, brother Archie Hastings was found complaining of the poor accommodations in Pontiac. The church was meeting in a hall and in a bad neighborhood. The next meeting of November 16, 1920, it was reported they were meeting in a place on Paddock Street across from McConnell school. This was apparently used for a couple of years. On the meeting date of February 14, 1922, brother Hastings reported that a building on Auburn Avenue had been found which was purchased for \$4,014.52. Brother Farley and brother Frye of Detroit were trustees. Apparently the Detroit brethren purchased this property themselves for the then fledgling congregation in Pontiac. This property was sold in June of 1926 at which time the church was then working on the new building on Tasmania. Harmon further says, "I can well remember the days when the church in Pontiac was fighting for its life." Particular credit should go to men like Archie Hastings and Ed Howe for their sacrificial efforts in those early days. In an explanatory note supplied by Myra Wilkins, we learned these further facts. Will Farley who served as trustee with brother Frye of the Auburn Avenue property, had a daughter, Mauvie Thompson, who lived in Pontiac and was doubtless one of the first members of the church in this city. Since she was Frank Killom's first cousin (Frank was Myra's father) that is how he first got involved in the Pontiac work. According to a Pontiac Press release featuring brother L. L. Yeagley, minister of the gospel when the church met at Tasmania, although the date is not attached, from ads on the reverse side, it would appear about 1940. The church of Christ in Pontiac was established in about 1921 by three members who conducted sessions in the city library according to this account which I referred to here. According to this report E. G. Rockcliff, then minister for the Fairview congregation in Detroit, assisted in the founding of the local work. Other threads of information indicate that in about the mid 20's the congregation was meeting in a dwelling house on Auburn Avenue. Sister Maggie Girdley came to Pontiac in 1926 from Eastland, Tennessee, at the time of her marriage and had looked in vain for a congregation of the church of Christ. Her father placed an ad in the Gospel Advocate requesting that anyone in the church of Christ in Pontiac to contact his daughter. As a result of this ad, brother C. C. Burns who was then coming to Pontiac to preach, knocked on her door and invited her to worship with the congregation which was continuing to meet in the house on Auburn Avenue. The group grew and they finally under support and supervision of the Vinewood congregation in Detroit, built the red brick, two story structure located at 2 South Tasmania. The brethren placed a tent on the rear of this property and worshipped there until bad weather caused them to rent the facilities of Eastern Junion High School. Sister Girdley placed her membership with the congregation at the time it met in this tent and she remained a member of the congregation through her life, moving from Tasmania to North Perry Street and finally to this location at University Drive. The building at 2 South Tasmania was dedicated to use in January of 1927. Claude Thomas was the first preacher for this congregation after moving into the building on Tasmania and was there until 1928 when brother Flavill Hall came and stayed until the fall of 1930. Brother Flavill Hall was reported to have been getting \$200 per month as preacher and was supposed to have his heat and utilities furnished. But sister Girdley related many times during the depression he took money from his own salary to buy coal to keep the church building heated. \$200 per month may have been a pretty good sized salary in 1930. But does anyone wonder why the theme of this week's meeting is "God's People Are Not Quitters" when we see this kind of willingness to hang in there when unexpected difficulties occur? After brother Hall left,

Frank Killom, the father of our sister Myra Wilkins, came and filled in for a while. He and his family lived in Farmington at first but came to Pontiac to worship because there was no congregation in Farmington. Later he and his family moved into the apartment over the auditorium. His daughter, Myra, met and married Ira J. Wilkins, and thus began the long association of the Wilkins family with this congregation. Brother Ira passed away in late 1982 but sister Myra is still with us. During the depression the membership of the congregation dropped and sister Girdley reported that she remembers one night when there were only four in attendance. Brother L. H. Andrews came around 1931 and stayed for two years after which his brother, Raymond, worked with the congregation for a while. Off and on during the depression many different preachers traveled to Pontiac and preached for the congregation. Among them were such men as brother McGary, brother McGee, brother Dean Thorman, brother C. B. Clifton, and Archie Hastings. In those days sister Girdley rode a streetcar to worship. And it was on these trips that she met Charles Harrington who was a conductor on one of these cars. Later, he and his wife, Goldie, became members of the congregation for the rest of their lives. Brother L. L. Yeagley was born on a farm near Alliance, Ohio, January 10, 1872, and graduated from Lipscomb College in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1899 and came to the Pontiac church of Christ in September of 1938. At the time of the report of brother Yeagley's work in about 1940, the membership was approximately 150 with an average attendance of 200 persons. Following brother Yeagley as minister of the congregation was brother Ed Alexander. Brother Jack Hawkins came in November of 1943 and remained with the congregation until July of 1947. Your speaker has known Jack since 1934 and he is today a friend of many of you in the audience and of others who have worshipped with area congregations where he has preached, especially at Sylvan Lake and Waterford. Some interesting events in the growth of the congregation while on Tasmania were related by brother Wilkins and sister Girdley. The original building had a seating capacity of 180. But in the late 40's an addition was placed on the back which increased seating capacity to 240. Before the addition the overflow crowd was accommodated by placing seats in the aisles. And even after the addition was made this was resorted to on occasion, a thing rarely seen in 1985. During the construction of the addition the men of the congregation used their combined efforts to place a huge I-beam in place one Wednesday night by the light of a kerosene lamp while the ladies had their Bible class in the basement. Due to the pressure of continued growth the congregation (then numbering about 300) this building was finally sold for \$20,500 and ten lots were purchased on North Perry for \$5,000. The church building, begun there in 1953, had a seating capacity of about 600 with ten or twelve small classrooms in the basement at a cost of \$90,000. When your speaker came to the congregation as a member in July of 1948, brother David Alan was the minister having followed brother Hawkins in 1947 and he preached for the congregation into the year of 1949. Brother Walter E. Bankes followed brother Alan and he remained with us into 1954 during which time the congregation built the North Perry Street building. Brother Milton E. Truex succeeded brother Bankes in 1954 and remained until 1957. The congregation continued to grow as those were prosperous times in our area and jobs were plentiful. Following brother Truex after an interval of several months without a regular preacher, brother W. W. Hall came in 1958 and served the congregation until 1961. Your speaker was asked to serve as an elder for the congregation in 1960. When brother Hall decided to leave in 1961 the eldership considered the past history of the congregation with reference to rather short tenure for preachers and sought seriously to implement a policy of longer tenure for ministers of the congregation both for the benefit of the congregation and the minister. This, of course, involved a lot of considerations including the background, aspirations of

the preacher, to the dedication of the eldership, the congregation and the sensitivity of the congregation and elders to the physical and financial as well as the spiritual and emotional needs of the minister and his family. The next preacher was Boyd Glover who came in 1961 and was still minister of the congregation at the time of the dedication of this building at 1500 University Drive on January 4, 1970. Brother Glover left during the fall of 1970. The cornerstone reflects the date of the ground breaking for this building which was about April 13, 1968, according to the Pontiac Press of that date. The congregation owes much to brother Boyd Glover for the chain of events which resulted in this building. The events began as a result of our need for additional classrooms at the building on North Perry Street. As the costs involved were considered we finally decided to buy 22½ acres on the north side of Perry Street near our 1180 North Perry Street address. After floating a \$150,000 bond issue to implement purchase of the 22½ acres for \$132,000 we stalled for two or three years while we tried to come up with a financing strategy to erect a building. Before that happened we took advantage of an option to buy the property where we are now located today and then sold the 22½ acres for \$400,000. With this we liquidated the balance due on the bond issue, paid \$175,000 cash for the 35½ acre parcel where we are now and had perhaps \$75,000 left for development and to begin construction. Subsequent financial pressures necessitated the sale of 24½ acres from the south side of this property for \$269,500 in 1968 or 1969. In 1985 we sold 2.9 acres from the east side of this property so that today we have a building which was reported in the Pontiac Press on October 4, 1969, page B-9, to have cost approximately \$650,000. It would cost between 1 and 1½ million dollars to build today. The North Perry property was sold in two transactions for \$125,000 for the building and part of the grounds and about \$40,000 for three lots fronting on Perry Street. After all these land transactions we now have a debt free building on approximately eight acres of land. The \$70,000 sale of 2.9 acres is yet to be completed. There are other interesting aspects of the various transactions which made this acquisition possible but we can only say that for men who were comparative neophytes in large real estate transactions we can but thank God for his guiding hand as we sorted out the various opportunities from the many potential financial pitfalls. If we had it to do over many things would have been done differently in terms of many physical aspects of the building. However, that is not possible. We simply with gratitude thank God that we are able to burn the mortgage on a very nice building that we hope can continue to be used for many years to further the Lord's word in Pontiac. Through the years this congregation has had a part in helping to start such congregations as Keego Harbor, now Sylvan Lake, Rochester, Clawson, and for several years we fully supported the work in Escanaba in the Upper Peninsula. And of course, I neglected to mention sister Eubank in Southeast Asia, and several other things you will see on these bulletin boards out here to the left or the east of the office. That history will be even more vital to look at than what I am telling you today. So, subsequent to the dedication of this building we sponsored the International School of Evangelism for several years. In those years and immediately following we have had as minister such men as Wes Witt, Nolan Crawford, Charlie Tutor, and Si Tilton. Dennis Winebarger and Lee Hodges were also very involved with the school. We presently have one full-time native missionary, Christian Nsoah, in Ghana and will be assuming all of his support immediately. Up to this time he has been supported with the aid from several sister congregations. As the congregation evaluates its resources we intend to augment our input into local and foreign mission work as well as do some urgently needed maintenance and building repairs which were deferred while we paid off the mortgage. We expect to use a substantial part of the excess funds to implement programs of work that will be initiated through the local

congregation so that none need suppose that we are now a congregation which is flush with funds for which we have no need. That is not to say that we will resolutely assume a stance of turning a deaf ear to all appeals. But it is saying that we intend to use this window of opportunity to expand the growth of the local congregation and the works that are generated through it. The elders who have served the congregation through the years from the beginning according to the information available to me have been O. T. Wilson, brother Evans, Charles Wallace, Luther Wallace, Frank Killom, George Killian, Ira J. Wilkins, Simon Coe, Louis Hatcher, Thomas (Tommy) Jones, Argyll C. Allen, Bude H. Little, Otis Palmer, Bill Yates, Ersel Riggerbach, Johnny Duncan, Joe Priestly, and Darrel S. Ashby. At this time our elders are Argyll C. Allen and Darrel S. Ashby. Baxter Feltner, Millan Holt and Mike Parent are our deacons. Our minister is Charlie Tutor. The building committee originally formed to draw up plans and specifications for this building consisted of Bude Little, chairman, Otis Palmer, Lawrence Pike, Fred Alexander, Joe Priestly, Ervie Jordan, and Charlene Smith, secretary. Honorary members were the elders and Boyd Glover, minister. Otis Palmer and Lawrence Pike later resigned from this committee and Darrel S. Ashby was appointed to it. Tom Milholland was later an honorary member as Director of Education. Brethren and friends of the congregation that meet here at 1500 University Drive, let me say in closing that this brief history has not been given in an aura of boastful arrogance for attainments past or present, of those who have gone before or for those of us who still remain with the congregation. Rather, I have sought from the sketchy information available to me to pass on for the benefit of those who will come after us at least a glimpse of what has happened to bring us to this date of our Lord, Sunday, July 14, 1985. You have seen that from very small beginnings, although the congregation has moved up and down in numbers and prosperity, we are still functioning as a faithful congregation of the Lord's people. This is testimony that at least some of its members have had the quality of dedication which caused them to hang in there regardless of difficulties. For this we are humbly grateful. And may the Lord appropriately reward all those who remain faithful to him whether in this congregation or others. As we look to the future having just passed through a period of economic down-turn that has sent many of our members scurrying as far as Florida and Texas looking for jobs, we are thankful that a few were able to stay with the congregation and that the original \$290,000 mortgage on a building that cost near \$650,000 in 1968 has been liquidated. And thus we are in effect burning the mortgage today. God has blessed us above our wildest dreams in these physical and financial aspects of the work in Pontiac. And as we look forward with zest and enthusiasm to spending more time and money in the future to implement plans and goals of the congregation for greater physical numbers in the membership and to reaching higher vista of spiritual growth as we continue to give greater and greater emphasis to our real reason for being members of the Lord's body, the church, that we might seek and save the lost in Pontiac and around the world. We are optimistic that the Lord will bless us if we seek as much as possible to be ready unto every good work. So, I have already mentioned and I would urge you again, look at the pictorial history that is out in the hall. That is the richer part. Thank you.