



Warren Avenue Church of Christ—May 2, 1915, to Sept. 10, 1922

## History of the West Side Central Church of Christ--May 2, 1915 to July 15, 1938

After spending ten years in establishing and building up new congregations in the state of Iowa and other midwestern states, Mr. and Mrs. Claud F. Witty came to Detroit, Michigan, to work with the Plum Street Church of Christ, August 1, 1912.

They remained with that splendid congregation two years and five months. During this time they established the Fairview Church on the east side of the city. When, however, they learned the Plum Street Church was not willing to assist in starting another congregation in the Northwest section of the city, they closed their work with the Plum Street Church and proceeded to establish the congregation that is now known as the West Side Central Church.

A small building was rented at 2138 Warren Avenue, near Fourteenth Avenue. \$150 was spent on the building before it could be used at all. Three months later \$1000 more was required for alterations and furniture. This rented building served the congregation for Seven year.

Starting with 13 charter members the congregation has had a consistent growth from its beginning, May 2, 1915, to the present time.

The seven years spent on Warren Avenue were years of great activity. Special Meetings were conducted by T. B. Larimore, T. Q. Martin, A. J. Bachman (two meetings), R. H. Boll, and G. W. Williams.

One debate was held in the building between Claud F. Witty and a Mr. Dudley, of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Soon after starting the congregation on Warren Avenue, it was thought wise to begin work in two other locations. Flint was selected as one of the fields, and the colored section west of Grand Boulevard and south of Tireman Avenue, in Detroit as the other.

Both efforts proved successful, and the three fine congregations in Flint and the three congregations among the colored people of Detroit all grew from these efforts.

As soon as the work in the three fields was well launched another location was selected, and a congregation started near Gratiot and Mt. Elliot Avenues. As Brother A. W. Hasting was now speaking at Flint, Brother C. H. Seehoffer for the colored congregation, and Brother Witty at Warren Avenue, Brother C. B. Clifton was invited to be the principal speaker for the Gratiot Avenue congregation.

This was a fine arrangement and all four congregations were making wonderful progress.

Then an evil hour came upon us.

The Plum Street Church announced that they would vacate the building at Fourth and Plum Streets, and move to their new location at Hamilton and Tuxedo Avenue.

Upon hearing of this move Brother A. Y. Malcomson, one of the Plum Street members, decided to take over the building on Plum Street and assemble another congregation, which would retain the historic name of "Plum Street Church of Christ".

The plan was an ambitious one. His first move was to employ Fred Cowan of Toronto, Ontario, as the minister. The second move was to go before the Cameron Avenue congregation, which had no regular minister at that time, and inform them that Brother Fred Cowan was moving to Detroit, and that he would be glad to support Brother Cowan and have him devote his time to the Cameron Avenue congregation if it was acceptable to them. It was.

Just at this time the great Influenza epidemic of 1918 swept over the world, leaving an estimated twelve million people dead in its wake.

A call was sent out from Harlan, Kentucky for help. Brother A. Y. Malcomson asked Brother and Sister Witty if they would answer the call if he would supply every thing

necessary and pay the expenses of the trip. They agreed.

During the time Brother and Sister Witty were caring for the sick in Kentucky, Brother Malcomson convinced Brother Clifton that it would be better for the cause of Christ in Detroit if the Gratiot Avenue mission would unite with the Cameron Avenue congregation, under Brother Cowan, and build up a strong church in that territory. Brother Malcomson then went before the Gratiot Avenue congregation the following Sunday and explained his plan. Part of the members protested. Part shed tears and part agreed. Early Monday morning, two of Brother Malcomson's trucks were loaded with furniture the Warren Avenue congregation had bought for about \$150, the rent on the building adjusted, and the key turned back to the owner. All within a period of twenty-four hours and without the know<sup>Edge</sup> or consent of the Warren Avenue congregation or Brother Witty.

In the meantime, all the congregations in the city were thrown into a state of confusion. It was now plain to be seen that an effort was being made to keep a large part of the members of the Plum Street Church from going to the new location. An effort was also made to draw members from the Vine-wood Congregation.

After moving the Gratiot Avenue Congregation to Cameron Avenue, it was planned to move the enlarged Cameron Avenue Congregation, with the preacher, Brother Cowan, to the new congregation on Plum Street.

The final move was to close the Warren Avenue Church, as well as Gratiot Avenue and Cameron Avenue. This would make the new congregation consist of a goodly number of the Plum Street members, many from Vinewood, all from Warren Avenue (now West Side Central), all from Cameron Avenue, and all from Gratiot Avenue. Brother Malconson engaged Brother H. F. Fleming and N. W. Copeland as his agents to deliver the Warren Avenue Church to the new congregation. Leading members were invited to the home of Brother Malconson on different occasions for secret meetings. A very strong effort was made to get those attending to agree to the plan. Part of them agreed and part did not.

Following these meetings Brother Fleming and Brother Copeland were sent to break the news to Brother and Sister Witty, that the Warren Avenue Church was to be closed up, and the congregation moved to another location, where a building had been provided and a preacher engaged. As might be supposed the minister and his wife were some what shocked when they received this startling bit of news.

During the next few weeks all the congregations in the city passed through a terrible period of strife. Twenty-three of the members of the Warren Avenue Congregation withdrew and entered the new congregation, but the congregation as such refused to do so. Cameron Avenue followed the same course.

In spite of the fact that many of the members of four or five congregations combined to make up the new congregation, it was not a success. Many of the members, including all that went from Warren Avenue and Brother Malcomson himself withdrew from the effort and Brother Cowan and those loyal to him went in a body to the Central Christian Church, where Brother Cowan was made co-pastor with Edgar DeWitt Jones.

As soon as the congregation recovered from the shock it sustained when twenty-three of its leading members removed to the other congregation, it resumed its onward march, and although twenty years have passed, peace and unity have prevailed without an interruption.

Early in the year 1922 it was learned that the property of the St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, located at Grand River, Fourteenth, and Forest Avenues, could be bought for \$36,000, with a down payment of \$5000.

The winter of 1921 and 1922 was a hard one and many people were in great need. To

help relieve the suffering among the needy, the congregation borrowed \$200 at the bank and neglected some bills in order to do its part.

Thus with no money in the treasury, and with an indebtedness of \$400 it was decided we should purchase the church building at Grand River and Fourteenth Avenues.

The membership of the congregation, while on Warren Avenue, increased from the thirteen Charter members to a gross membership of 328. About 160 of them being regular in their attendance at the time of the change in locations.

One of the greatest tasks we have ever undertaken was to raise the \$5000 required to gain possession of the first home the congregation ever owned. But by the help of the heavenly Father, the last dollar was in hand early in September. Our last service was held in the rented store room at 2138 Warren Avenue, Sunday, September 10, 1922.