

Bethel Christian Reformed Church

January 19, 2025



History of Bethel Church ~ *written by Cork Steenwyk*

The Beginning

The first Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan was overcrowded. At the Sunday morning services several families, including ours, sat in a building called The Chapel which was located on the southeast corner of the church property. We couldn't see the minister or what was happening in the service. We could listen to him through a loudspeaker which carried the message from the church.

The decision was made to demolish the church building and build a new one on the same property. Several members considered this a good time to organize a new church. They appeared at the Council meeting on November 21, 1949, to ask for permission to canvas the congregation as to the possibility of organizing another church. Permission was granted. Fifty-two families and four individuals signed on as charter members.

The Council gave their approval for the organization. The petition to organize had to be presented to Classis Zeeland which met in Immanuel Christian Reformed Church of Hudsonville on January 11, 1950. They gave their unanimous consent to organize. We were called Fourth Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland. At a congregational social a few weeks later, it was decided to give ourselves a name. The almost unanimous choice was Bethel, which means "House of God."

The organization took place on January 19, 1950, with Rev. Bruinooge from Third Christian Reformed Church presiding. The first order of business was the election of council members. Jacob Buter, John Gras and Herman A. Ten Harsmel were elected to be elders. Martin Jelgersma, Eli Nykamp and Cyrus Van Haitsma were chosen as deacons.

A collection was taken at this meeting to buy a big, Pulpit Bible and Psalter Hymnals. The amount collected was \$82.33.

The first council meeting was held at the home of John Gras. Bethel would be needing guest ministers until we could get a pastor, so it was decided to give them \$8.00 per sermon. At the second meeting it was decided to give seminary students \$2.00 above the regular \$8.00 for expenses.

Where would they meet? The newly built Zeeland Christian School on Central Avenue gave us permission to meet in their multi-purpose room. At this time Central Avenue was still a gravel road. The parking lot on the west side was a field.

To save electricity during the evening services all the lights were turned off except for the one on the stage. The pastor preached to an audience he could hardly see. For several years after we began to worship in our church the janitor dimmed the lights.

The First Year

The two primary considerations for our new church were to secure a pastor and find a site to build our church.

According to custom the council presented a trio of pastors to be considered for a call. Rev. George Holwerda from Aetna, Michigan, Christian Reformed Church was chosen. His annual salary was to be \$3,000 and he would be given three weeks of vacation. We were overjoyed that he accepted our first call. Rev. Holwerda was installed on October 6, 1950, and served Bethel until April 25, 1954. He was a youthful and active minister who willingly pitched in with physical labor in building the church and painting the parsonage.

Getting a pastor went smoothly. Now we had to concentrate on our second priority: finding land on which to build a church and find a place for our new pastor to live.

On the corner of Main Street and Carlton Avenue was a piece of property known as the Brouwer property. It measured 260' by 225' or 70,000 square feet. The purchase price was \$12,000 and included an eleven-room home. Mrs. Brouwer was 93 years old at the time. She requested that the property be kept in her name until her death, at which time the property would be transferred to Bethel Church. The council agreed to this arrangement. The property also included adequate room for parking facilities. The property was purchased. What a blessing! We now had a home for the new pastor to live in and property to build a church.

At the time of the purchase someone operated a produce stand on the corner of the property facing Carlton. It was agreed that they might keep it there in the summer during which the church was being built.

There was a rumor around town during this time that the house was haunted! Mrs. Brouwer belonged to a religious group that believed that they could communicate with the spirit of dead relatives. She believed that her husband appeared and talked to her. I did a lot of babysitting for the Holwerdas' and never heard any strange noises. Nor did the Holwerda, Haan and Graves families.

Building the Church

On September 25, 1950, a congregational meeting was held to decide on proposals to build a church and to discuss financing the project. The Finance Committee was given permission to take out a loan of \$30,000 at 4% interest. A debt reduction plan in which each family would pay \$25 per family per year was accepted.

The Building Committee had the task of deciding which style church to build. On January 12, 1951, the congregation members unanimously approved a traditional style red brick building. MR. A.J. Karsten was chosen as the builder. In May the actual construction began.

In order to keep the building expenses down, a bulletin announcement asked for as many men as possible to come with shovels on Monday evening at 6:30 to help dig the trenches for the footings. They were reminded to wear rubbers or boots. My dad, along with many other men, who had already put in a full day at their day job, answered the call. They had to dig through hard clay. He remembered that Jim Wabeke Sr. leaned on his shovel and asked, "Why did I ever leave First Church?" Other men were probably thinking the same thing, but they all went back to digging and completed the job.

The work throughout the summer went well. A ceremony to lay the cornerstone was held on August 30 at 6:30pm. Rev. Lambert Van Haitsma, Rev. Holwerda and Rev. William Kok, a former pastor at First Christian Reformed Church, and pastor to many of the older members of our church, took part in the program. Simon Kroll listed the contents which were placed in a copper box inside the cornerstone. Rev. Holwerda placed the mortar around the stone. The congregation joined together to sing the doxology.

The building went well during the winter. In May 1952 it was completed and ready for dedication. On the evening of May 14, a Dedication Service was held for Bethel members. On the 15th the general public could attend. Representatives from Classis Zeeland, neighboring churches and city officials attended. Dr. Dirk Bloemendaal, a Zeeland doctor and our mayor, gave a nice congratulatory speech. Having a kitchen in a church was rare, but we could now serve refreshments from our own kitchen.

The new Baldwin organ, which was purchased at a cost of \$3,174, was dedicated on Tuesday, May 30 with Mr. Stuart Noordyke, a well-known radio and church organist as the guest organist.

Sunday, May 30, 1952, was the exciting big day. Bethel Christian Reformed

Church of Zeeland, Michigan, held its first regular worship service. Holy communion was celebrated with a new format. Rather than eating the bread and drinking the wine when it was passed, we would hold them until everyone was seated. The holders on the pews were designed for the wine glasses.

A personal note here. The morning of our first service my face was red and flushed, but I wasn't going to miss that exciting service. My mom thought it was just excitement. When I returned home my face had broken out in a rash. I had scarlet fever!

During the first couple years of our existence, it was exciting to see an announcement in the bulletin many times expressing thanks to an anonymous donor for the gift of \$100.

The plan for the church called for digging and constructing the full basement. But only the south part would be built at first. This included the sanctuary, the narthex, and a balcony. The first idea was to put folding chairs in the balcony, but that was changed in favor of pews.

The back part was roofed just above ground level until growth in membership made this part necessary. Entrance to the sanctuary was by climbing several steps and entering the front doors. The original entrance composed the north wall of our present narthex.

Bethel did something which shocked Zeeland! They put a cross on the peak of the church. Only Catholic churches had crosses on them. Is "Bethel a Catholic Church?" was a big question around town. When the new narthex was added a cross of glass bricks was incorporated into our front wall. A few years ago, a member of Second Reformed Church made a collage of pictures of crosses in Zeeland. A picture of our front window is included.

In 1962 the building was extended to the north. The pulpit area was moved back and more pews added. The tower, which was originally planned for the northeast side was instead built on the southwest corner. At this time shrubbery was put around the building, sidewalks were added, the parking area was blacktopped, and underground sprinkling was installed in the church and parsonage lawns.

A major renovation was done to the interior of the church in 1977. An Allen Computer organ was installed. At the request of some church members three parking spaces were designated for those with difficulties getting around. A ramp was installed extending from these parking spaces to the front door. Bethel was presented with an award by a local service group for being the first Zeeland church to have a ramp.

The following year our beautiful stained-glass windows were installed. The north window over the pulpit area was a problem. It was large and contained plain glass panels which were just lightly tinted. Rev. Graves was our pastor at the time. In the morning it was hard to see him because of the glare of the sun. Someone tried to solve the problem by painting the panes with blue paint. The next solution was to hang a green velvet curtain over it with a wooden cross in front of it. In 1978 the decision was made to take money left to our church by Simon Vande Luyster who passed away, and commission John Vanden Burgh, a local stained-glass artist, to make a big window for the pulpit and windows in the sanctuary, which were also plain glass.

Ken Vander Veen spent much time overseeing the building and installation of the windows. He watched as John drew the pictures on paper, cut them out in pieces and traced them onto the stained glass. After they were put in the church, he told Ken the stories of the windows and the symbolism that is portrayed. Ken wrote this up and many members were given a copy.

The windows tell the Story of Redemption. The story begins with the rear west window and works around to the back of the east side. Each window depicts a part of the plan beginning with the fall of Adam. It ends with the last judgement. The large front window shows Jesus as Redeemer and King. This was taken from the book of Revelations.

In 2000 a large addition was added to the front of the building. This contained an elevator leading to the main floor and the basement, library, pastor's office, secretary's office and workroom, bathrooms, facilities for making coffee and a larger narthex for socializing. A covered walkway was also built leading from the east door to the parking lot. It was dedicated in 2001. In 2024 the library was removed and made into "the Nook" – a place for meetings and socializing.

The larger narthex made it possible for socializing after the services. In the morning, decaf, regular coffee and juice are now available to go along with the delicious cookies baked by Susan Wabeke. Bethel was envied by people from other churches because we have the former owners of Zeeland Bakery, Harvey and Sandee Konynenbelt, who provided beautiful, decorated cakes and yummy pastries for special occasions.

The first cornerstone was moved next to the west side entrance. A second stone was placed next to it in 2000.

The interior of the building was redone in 2017. The pulpit was changed to a stage with space and electrical outlets for the praise team. The piano and organ, which were formerly on the floor, were moved onto the stage.

The carpet was pulled up and new flooring installed. The pastor's stand, baptismal font and table for communion cup and plate were made by Todd Wabeke, using wood from our former pews. They were stained by Leon Kragt. Our windows never had frames around them. At this time, they were framed and parts of the paneling on the bottom half of the walls were also made from this wood. Rick Rottschäfer and his crew did this work. A new power-point system was installed which screens songs and messages on the walls on both sides of the stage area.

In 2019 our kitchen was given a much-needed facelift. But – it couldn't be used for almost a year because COVID hit the country. The kitchen is used for many events and the new look is much appreciated.

The Parsonage

The building of the church was a main concern. However, the house which became our parsonage also needed some attention. In August a bulletin announcement asked for help from congregation members. The home needed new paint, but first it must be washed and old paint scraped off. Men were asked to come at 6:30pm on Monday and Tuesday evenings with ladders, pails, cleaning rags, etc. to do the job.

A new kitchen was built, and other improvements were made. In 1967 the congregation decided not to put any more money into the old parsonage, but to tear it down and build a new one. A committee was formed to work on this matter.

Henry Balder, a Bethel member, expressed interest in the old home. It was decided to give it to him for \$1 if he would remove it from the lot. This must not have been as big a bargain as it seemed because the Houting Meeusen Wrecking Co. was paid \$675 by our church to demolish and take away the old building. On April 15, 1968, the congregation voted to spend up to \$45,000 for a new parsonage.

A colonial style was decided to go with the brick church. The new parsonage included the pastor's study. When the new narthex was built the pastor's study was put in the church.

Rev. Ouwinga was our pastor at that time. The Balders had previously bought an old school building in Beaverdam which they converted into a rental home. The Ouwingas lived there during the construction of the new parsonage. They enjoyed the peaceful rural area.

Pastors

Bethel has been faithfully served by ten pastors. Their wives took active roles in the life of our church. Rev. George and Evelyn Holwerda were involved with us from the beginning. They were followed by Reverends Gilbert and Kay Haan, Ray and Johanna Graves, Menko and Johanna Ouwinga, Gerrit and Janet Sheeres, Henry and Nancy Vanden Heuvel, Gerrit and Judy Veenstra, Jack and Judy Vander Plate, Dan and Liz Kinnas and Jon and Allie Bosma.

Pastors Haan, Kinnas and Bosma were ordained in Bethel Church. Pastor Vander Heuvel celebrated his 25th anniversary in the ministry. Pastors Ouwinga and Vander Plate retired from Bethel. Five children were born during the time their parents were in Bethel: Marcia Haan, Noah and Vivian Kinnas, Riley and Theo Bosma.

The title for the pastors changed throughout the years. Many of the older people were from the time when the minister was called Domine, so Rev. Holwerda and Rev. Haan were often called Domine Holwerda or Domine Haan. Then the term Reverend became more common. When Pastor Vander Plate came, he wanted to be called Pastor Jack. Since then, we had Pastor Dan and now Pastor Jon.

Seven young men from Bethel have gone into the ministry. Marvin Konynenbelt was ordained at Bethel and spent his career as a chaplain in the U.S. Army. John Ouwinga, Joel Sheeres, Curt Walters, Cody Statema, Randy Raak, and Rob Gruessing were ordained for ministry work in many churches.

Changes in Worship

There have been several changes in the format and style of our worship services as the years have gone by. In the early years the King James Version of the Bible was read in church as well as in the home. In the late 1960's the New International Version was introduced and became popular in homes and churches because it was easier to understand. Evelyn Nienhuis gave the church money in memory of her husband Verne to be used for a music stand for the choir director and an NIV pulpit Bible. When COVID hit the Bibles were taken out of the pew racks. They have since been returned but the congregation is encouraged to take their own Bibles. The pastors have their favorite versions, so the big pulpit Bibles are no longer used.

The new Bibles changed the prayer language in homes and churches. Formerly the King James language was used in prayer. That has changed to using “you” and “your” in reference to God.

Songbooks and songs changed dramatically over the years. In 1950 the Red Psalter was common. In 1959 the Blue Psalter was published. That was replaced by the Gray Psalter in 1988.

In the 1990's, Bethel members were asked to give names of some of their favorite songs. These were put together in a book and called The Bethel Hymnal. They were sung in our evening services and also during the praise time we had for about the first 10 minutes of the service. Members were chosen to pick the songs for the praise time. Also, requests were taken. Recently another book was published which Bethel didn't buy. When COVID hit the songbooks were taken out of the pew racks and not replaced. Now we sing songs from Power Point.

The times for the evening church services became earlier and earlier. We began at 7:30PM. In 1957 it was changed to 7PM so school-age kids could get to bed earlier. We lost a few farm families because that time interfered with the milking time for their cows. In 1976 the time was changed to 6PM. In the early 2000's the evening service started at 5PM on a trial basis during the summer months. The council decided to keep that time. For many months the evening service change to a Bible Study time. During COVID we had no services for several months. When that ban was lifted, we met for morning services only. The evening service did not return.

Women in Council

In 2008, four members were elected to serve on council—all women. They were Angie Ploegstra, Henny Van Beek, Marlene Engelsman and Alma Vander Veen. Marlene Engelsman and Linnay Compagner were the first mother and daughter to serve together. Ken and Alma Vander Veen were the first husband and wife on the same council.

Sunday School

Sunday School classes were organized as soon as we had a church building. My mother was a teacher for the kindergarten class. The way to tell the Bible stories to little kids was by using flannelgraph boards. They were large boards covered with plain flannel fabric. The Christian Reformed Publishing House provided sets of pictures made from a flannel-like material that would stick to the boards. My dad made the boards and the easel to put them on. The pictures came in sheets and had to be cut out. My job was to cut out the pictures and sort out those my mom would need for a certain lesson. One week a picture of a man would be Noah. The following week he could be Moses. A new packet of pictures was sent out quarterly. Collections were taken. For several years the Sunday School had special projects. One year they bought a Honda motorcycle for a missionary.

Mary-Martha Society

The ladies formed an active society named Mary-Martha. As their first project, they worked to buy a communion set. They had baked goods sales, served lunches to some business groups, and held after-church hymn sings to raise money for their projects. Several women went blueberry picking to earn money to buy things needed for the kitchen. My parents, who had a big garden, raised mum plants which they sold at 3/\$1.00 to help purchase needed items.

To obtain silverware for our church kitchen the ladies of the church collected Betty Crocker Coupons. Many Betty Crocker cake-mix cakes were served to after-church coffee guests in our homes. Woe be to the person who would choose a different brand of mix! My mother was in charge of getting them sent to the Company. My job was to trim them neatly and count them into piles of a certain number.

As the membership of the Mary-Martha society grew a desire was expressed for older members who didn't like to get out at night to form another lady's society. Many ladies agreed to this. They named their group the Tryphosa Society. They met in the afternoon. Their offerings were used partly to buy a book for the library in member of a Bethel member who died.

The men organized a Men's Society. Almost every male member attended. They did many work projects for members who needed them.

Young People's Society/Youth Group

A Young People's Society was also formed. The meetings started with Bible Study, followed by lunch and a time of fun. "Concentration" was a favorite game. There were parties, scavenger hunts and hayrides. One year we planned to have a sleigh ride. John Zwagerman, a Bethel member who owned a farm north of Zeeland provided the horses and wagon or sleigh. We were very enthused about the sleigh ride even though it was a very cold night. But John called it off because it was too cold for the horses. Rev. Holwerda was very amused that the horses had more sense than we humans did. In the 2000's, their name changed to Youth Group. They became interested in going on serve projects. They went to Kentucky, Barnesboro, PA and Minnesota.

Cadets

Cadet Clubs were beginning to form for boys in the Christian Reformed Church. The Bethel Cadet Club was formed for boys of the church ages 12-15. Bernie Ten Harmsel led them in getting started and the first meetings were held in the garage of Bernie and Mary Ann Ten Harmsel who lived on Main Street. Their next meeting place was in the chicken coop of Gary and Marilyn De Haan on Perry Street. Many fathers and older boys were Cadet leaders. Evan Broekhuis became a leader and is still in the program 38 years later, although we currently don't have a club because there are no boys.

In June 1966, a building on Carlton Street across from the church was purchased from Henry Van Gelderen for \$6,500 to be used for a Cadet building. Van Gelderen, a builder, used it as a workshop and a storage space. Previous to that, it was a chicken coop. Rev. Bonnema, pastor at First CRC, raised pigeons in it.

Originally the building was just one long room where the Cadets had Bible Study and social events on one side and used the other side for their workshop area. Jarvis Broekhuis proposed the idea of putting in walls and having a restroom and a kitchen. He did the plumbing work, and the Brummel brothers put up the concrete block walls. The building served the Cadets well but was deemed unsafe and was razed on November 5, 2013. It was also used for some church functions.

GEMS

Since the young boys had a Cadet Club the girls wanted a club too. The council gave their approval for their girls to have Calvinettes, which were beginning in Christian Reformed Churches. Many mothers and older girls were leaders of the groups. Their name has been changed from Calvinettes to GEMS – Girls Everywhere Meeting the Savior.

Besides kids from Bethel, many other boys and girls from other churches or from the area joined Bethel's clubs. After we became involved in Kids Hope many boys and girls were encouraged by their mentors to join GEMS or Cadets.

Music

Music has always been an important part of Bethel Church. When we met in the school while the church was being built, we sang with the piano. Marie Ten Harmsel was our pianist. Since the plans for the church included an organ, the church paid for Marie to take organ lessons so she could accompany the congregation in singing. She played for 36 years. Marie Blauwkamp joined Bethel and was an organist for more than 50 years. Cindy Nienhuis, Judy Veenstra, Nancy and Amy VandenHeuvel, Pastor Jack and Erik Westenbroek were other organists from Bethel. We also had many guest organists.

The first organ was a Baldwin electronic organ. In 1976 \$12,373.06 was received from the estate of Winifred Buma Bosgraaf and was used to purchase the Allen organ. In the early years the organists played for free and bought their own music. Later they were paid \$5.00 a year. The Baldwin organ along with the pulpit furniture were later donated to the chapel in Allegan. The keyboard was also used after someone gave one to our church. Pat De Haan and Pastor Jack played it.

Since the interior of the building was redone in 2017, we are led in singing by the praise team accompanied by the piano and several instruments. Pat De Haan played for several years, and Nicole Compagner is presently a pianist, along with several pianists from other churches.

Rev. Holwerda organized a church choir and was the director. Many members sang. We worked up a program which was presented on a Friday evening. A large group of people came out to hear us sing.

Henry Hoekema, band and choir director at Zeeland Christian School, organized a choir. The place of choir music in church was a controversial issue at that time. In 1960 we were given permission to sing if we would do so from

the balcony so it wouldn't look like we were putting on a show. This we did but it was difficult because there was a small gap of time between the pianist playing the notes and the director hearing them and keeping us in time.

After some persuasion, two years later we were allowed to sing from the floor in front of the pulpit. It was believed that only the minister was allowed on the pulpit. Gradually ideas changed. When the interior of the sanctuary was redone in 1977 the choir loft was put on the pulpit behind the pastor and the choir stayed up there during the entire service. Choir robes were purchased. They were pretty—off-white with green stoles.

There were problems with the acoustics. The sound and words didn't project out into the sanctuary so the congregation couldn't hear them very well. Two hanging microphones were installed above the choir, but it didn't help. After a couple years it was decided to sing from the steps in front of the pulpit and the choir loft was taken out. For the past years Bethel has had no choir.

Marie Blauwkamp, Nancy Mulder and Gary De Haan were other Bethel members who directed the choir. We hired several others who directed us for short periods of time.

The Sunday School kids had a choir and sang for Christmas programs or Sunday services. Nancy Mulder requested instruments such as bells and tambourines which the little kids could play while they sang. They were always enjoyable to hear and watch.

In the 1980's Marie Blauwkamp organized a fund to buy handbells and organized a bell choir. Bethel members could buy a bell or contribute money to the fund. When the fund was large enough to buy three octaves the first bells were purchased, along with cases for storage, tables and music stands. Enough money was raised so that the choir had five octaves. Usually, numbers were presented during the service by the full choir. But sometimes small groups played. At one service two girls played. They were very busy switching from one bell to another. Four years later a hand chimes choir was formed consisting of young children.

Bethel usually had a Ladies' sextette which sang for the church services as well as other places in the community.

Bethel Band

Pat De Haan, one of our pianists, got a group of musicians from Bethel to organize a band. It was known as the Bethel Band. They provided music for some services and programs. It included players from junior high, high school and some older musicians.

Missions

Rev. and Mrs. Ouwinga had a great interest in missions. In 1968 Johanna encouraged a number of ladies to organize a Workshop for Missions. They met on alternate Thursdays from fall to spring to sew quilts and baby clothes. These were used by the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee for disaster victims who lost their belonging in floods, earthquakes, or tornadoes. Baby clothes were sent to Dr. Peter Bolema, Jr. in Cary, Mississippi. The ladies had an assortment of foot-pedaled or electric sewing machines. Much of the fabric and thread was donated to them. This group worked for 20 years.

Rev. Ouwinga encouraged our support of missions. In 1960 we began to support Rev. Jerry Patt, who was a Spanish-speaking missionary to migrants, and later in Mexico. A few years later we took on partial support of Gertrude Van Haitsma in Nigeria. After she retired in 1974, we adopted partial support of Rev. Harvey Kiekoover in Nigeria. We also supported Rev. Fred Diemer who worked with Cubans in Miami. During the years we supported other local and foreign missionaries. At present we support Nancy Ten Broek, Brenda Vander Schuur and the Buursma family in the Philippines. Two young men from Bethel are working in other countries. Matt Beukema works with economic development in Romania. Mark De Haan works in Ecuador with a group that pipes water to small villages so they can have water in their homes.

In 1998 fifteen Bethel members volunteered for 10 days to build a school near Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. When they arrived just one row of cement blocks had been laid for the foundation. They were able to construct a three-room cement block school. Each Room measured 20' by 20'. It also included an office. Women in that country did not wear slacks so the ladies had to wear skirts and blouses. The group was challenged by driving in Santo Domingo traffic, the food, lack of plumbing and electricity, tarantulas and lizards in their sleeping quarters.

In 1962 our congregation voted to sponsor a Cuban Refugee family. They lived on Main Street. They did not adjust very well to America. They didn't like the cold weather. Their house we provided wasn't as nice as what they had in Cuba. They eventually moved to a warmer place. It is unknown if they ever moved back to Cuba.

Laotian Family

At one time when many people were fleeing their countries because of war and unrest the council decided to sponsor a refugee family from Laos. Arnie Baker did much to help the Soukhome family, along with his wife Nancy. In fact, the children called her "Grandma Nancy." For a time the family had a grocery store in a front room of their home on West Main Street where they sold groceries and produce to other refugee families in this area. Once a week some of the family members went to Chicago to buy supplies for this store. This family became well-integrated in this area. One of the sons owns a dry-wall business. Ann Holstege helped some members of the family with learning English. One of those girls graduated from Grand Valley State University a few years ago.

Disaster Relief

In the early 1970's the Christian Reformed World Relief (CRWRC) organization was formed to aid disaster victims in the United States. People were asked to volunteer their time and talents for this project. The Gary De Haan family spent a spring break week in Pineville, Kentucky, helping some families whose homes were damaged by a flood. The following year Henry and Henrietta Steenwyk spent a month in Pineville. In 2009 Joel and Angie Ploegstra volunteered for their first time and since then have worked every year usually going 2 or 3 times a year. They have worked in many parts of the U.S., including Alaska. Mike and Karen Meyer and Ken and Alma Vander Veen also volunteered for projects. The name has been changed from CRWRC to Disaster Relief Services (DRS).

The youth group went on several SERVE projects to various parts of the country. They always had many stories to tell about painting, scraping paint, repairing roofs and porches, etc. They also had time for fun things. Even traveling in the Meyers' motorhome was fun, playing cards, singing, snacking on goodies given by church members and napping. They met kids from other parts of the country.

In 2009, an all-church SERVE project was done in Waterloo, IA, following a flood in that area.

Over the years many groups or individuals helped local families with repair jobs, moving, painting and helping with many small jobs.

Church Secretaries

Clara Ten Harmsel was our first “paid” secretary. She was paid 50 cents a week to type and print a one-page bulletin. If there were more pages, she was given 50 cents for each extra page. Clara and Harvey lived in an apartment on Central Avenue. She had a typewriter and a copy machine at home on which she cranked out the bulletins. After the north addition was added to the church, she still typed at home, but her copy machine and packages of paper were moved to the upper northeast room. Clara served us faithfully for 28 years. During those years she printed over 1,500 bulletins and other papers.

Judy Von Dobschutz took over the secretary's job from Clara. She began by doing the work at home. During the year between Rev. Veenstra leaving and Pastor Jack coming she worked in the pastor's office in the parsonage. The new narthex, which was completed in 2001, included a secretary's office. Judy worked there during the last ten of her 20 years as our secretary. She transitioned from using a typewriter to a computer. Besides making and answering hundreds of phone calls she sent and received many emails.

Our present secretary is Nicole Compagner. She began working in July 2012. She prints our bulletins, Reflections and many other papers and reports. She handles much correspondence, phone calls and emails. With her expertise on the computer, she can design and make everything she prints and emails look good and in color.

The Library

In 1955 a library was formed. The council asked Nell Gras to serve as the first librarian. In 1956 Rev. Haan was empowered to regulate the amount of fines that were to be charged for overdue books. George and Alice Van Klompenberg and Dorothy Brummel were librarians during the early years. Kay Raak served for many years as head librarian. During these years the library was the small room in the former narthex which is now the janitor's room.

When the front addition was put on a new library was built next to the entrance doors on the front west side of the church. Cornelia Steenwyk and Ann Holstege, who was the head librarian at the time, loaded all the books shelf by shelf onto a cart and brought them in our new elevator down to the library. Robin Dykema was the head librarian for many years. The library was removed in 2024 and was replaced with a gathering place now called “The Nook”.

The Archives

After Bethel Church was organized Clara Ten Harmsel became our first official church secretary. During her 28 years of service, she kept a copy of every bulletin and program that she printed. Judy Van Dobschutz continued with this practice. A copy of every Bethel Happenings, which later became the Reflections, has also been preserved.

In the 1990's Betty De Haan and Cornelia Steenwyk were asked by the council to be archivists and to organize all this material. We attended a workshop in Grand Haven on organizing and establishing an archive. The council purchased a fire-proof file cabinet in which much of the material is stored. The file cabinet was kept in the custodian's room. Several years ago, after a congregational meeting, several men moved the very heavy cabinet up to the upstairs room on the northeast.

Photocopies of pertinent information relating to our congregation along with all meeting minutes are also on file in the Calvin University Archives.

When Betty De Haan resigned Angie Ploegstra took her place. The year we celebrated our 65-year anniversary Angie and I made a pictorial history of our church by putting the material on white foam boards to display them. They have been kept up to date.

Technology

Until 1960 Bethel had no microphone system. The pastors had to preach with a loud voice so they could be heard. In the 1990's the decision was made to record the Sunday sermons on a tape recorder so shut-ins could hear the message. The janitor was in charge of doing the recording. About that time a large screen was put up in a front corner to project video films, songs not in the hymnals, and other information for the congregation. The next step up was to make DVDs of the messages so shut-ins and others could see and hear the pastor. The camera was placed in the balcony.

In 2020, when COVID hit, no one could attend church in person. Technology was installed so the message could be streamed online. Pastor Jon gave his message from various locations in the church or his home. This was a blessing since we could still keep in touch as a church and had a feeling of still being Bethel members. The services since then have been live streamed. The camera has been moved to the main floor alongside the projection and sound systems. David Staat has been in charge of the camera for many years.

Tim Den Besten, Bryan Kragt, and Hugh Bartels keep the systems running. Kameron Compagner and Zachary Fox help with the Power Point on Sunday mornings. Members who didn't have computers were able to listen to the message on the telephone. The prayer line is also available via e-mail or telephone.

Local Outreach

During the past 25 to 30 years Bethel has become very active in local outreach.

In 1985 a large home on the corner of Church Street and Central Avenue was purchased by the Zeeland Churches. It was named Parkview Home and is to be used for Adult Foster Care. Bethel became a supporting church. Several members have served on the Parkview board.

Several outreach programs were begun during the time that Pastor Veenstra served us. Coffee Break, which was held at First Reformed Church, was a combined effort of many Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches. The group met in the morning. Pat De Haan was on the board. The membership was gradually declining. There was discussion about whether it would be more effective in reaching women and girls if it was moved to the evening.

The thought was discussed that many women who worked full-time would appreciate a meal along with a Bible Study and children's activity hour so the name Supper Break! was chosen. Bethel had the largest number of volunteers, so they were chosen as the meeting place. Several Bethel members served as leaders. Delicious food was made and served by church women. Others provided games for the kids.

Getting ladies to know about Supper Break! was a concern. After finding out that the city would not allow us to set up another permanent sign in front of the church it was suggested to make a cloth sign that could slip over the current church sign on the day of supper. After a few years the other churches decided to opt out of supporting Supper Break! and Bethel became the only church still involved. About ten years ago, due to only one or two ladies attending, it was decided to discontinue. It was sad for us as leaders, but the ladies understood and said they would try to find other Bible Studies.

Kids Hope USA, is an outreach ministry to engage volunteer mentors for at risk students. Each student/mentor couple would have a prayer partner. The

program was begun in February 1998. Lincoln Elementary was the first school and Bethel was the first church to come on board with the program with 10 tutors. The Kids Hope slogan is One School, One Church, One Hour. In the fall of 1999, we had 17 tutors. We partner with Faith Reformed Church to work at Lincoln. Audrey Veldhof became the director for Bethel, a position she held faithfully for 21 years. One stipulation for being a sponsor for Kids Hope is that the director would be a paid position, with the salary being paid by the church. Over the 26 years of our involvement, about 125 Bethel members served as mentors and prayer partners to 125 students from Lincoln School.

In January 2019 Audrey informed the council that she would be retiring from Kids Hope after the Kids Hope season ended. Sadly, she became sick from cancer so could not finish the year. She died on June 5, 2019.

Heather Dannenberg became the new director. But COVID happened. She devised a plan in which students and mentors would communicate with each other by writing notes. Only kids who were in the program were involved that year. There were no new students or mentors. Heather did a wonderful job keeping the program going but did not return as director the next year. The council decided to ask Luann Kempema, the director of Faith Church, if she would take on Bethel's program also. She agreed.

For many years Bethel partnered with First Reformed Church in providing a food giveaway. Once a month a huge truck loaded with food would park on Carlton Street. People would line up by the Cadet building to receive the free food. Food was passed out rain, shine or snow! In the winter months donuts and hot chocolate were provided for those who stood out in the cold waiting for the food. Audrey Veldhof was the director of this program. Bethel's share of the cost was paid with money left to the church by John and Nell Grass and designated for outreach. First Reformed Church decided to go in another direction and discontinued their involvement. Since Bethel couldn't handle this project alone it was discontinued.

In the 1990's and early 2000's Bethel held an ice cream social on our parking lot for people in the neighborhood as well as Bethel members and anyone else who stopped by. Pat De Haan led this project for many years. Shelly Bartels took over from her. It was very successful. There were games with prizes, a dunk tank, slip 'n slide, an antique fire truck ride and free ice cream with toppings. It involved many members' help. The Youth Group was always helpful in running the games. However, our membership began to decline, and many younger members left, to the point that it was no longer possible to continue.

After having nothing like it for a couple of years Bryan and Wendy Kragt initiated a new project – Great Adventure. On Tuesday nights in July kids can come for games, treats and a Bible Story. On the last night there is food and entertainment.

The Bethel parsonage has a large backyard. In the spring the ground is plowed and made into food plots for the use of anyone in the church or community who wishes to plant a garden. Many people make use of this offer as well as some uninvited guests like rabbits, mice and larger animals.

In the winter another area behind the parsonage is frozen and an ice rink is put up. Bethel has a few pairs of ice skates for use by the skaters.

In 2014, the idea was presented to use the large lot on Carlton north of the church building to build a playground for kids in the area. The idea was presented to the city council who thought it was a good idea since there is no playground in this area. But they didn't really want to be involved in the project. This story was written up in a local paper and an anonymous donor gave a check for \$25,000 towards the project. The city then gave their permission and offered to provide bark and give some other help.

The playground equipment came in a huge semitruck from Alabama on a cold stormy day. The driver was nervous since he wasn't used to driving in snow, and he had a problem finding the church. Zeeland Lumber provided a vehicle and Kyle Wabeke, to unload the equipment. In the spring several men and women from Bethel put the parts together. Audrey Veldhof who headed this program solicited funds from the Veterans in our church for the purpose of purchasing a flag and flagpole to be located on a corner of the playground. Because of the involvement of Lloyd and Audrey in making this a reality the playground, which was named Carlton Street Playground, was dedicated to the memory of Lloyd and Audrey Veldhof. A ceremony for that purpose followed an outside church service we had in the summer when it was completed.

The 70,000 square feet of property Bethel acquired in 1950 has been put to good use in serving the Zeeland community.

In August, Vacation Bible School is held at Logan Estates. Bethel partners with other churches in this endeavor. Hannah Rottschafer is the leader from Bethel. Jessica Rottschafer works with kids doing the crafts and Steve Dykema comes up with the games for the kids. Bethel members provide food and other goods.

There are many students in the Zeeland School system dealing with food-insecurity. On school days they can get a hot lunch in school. But on

weekends many go hungry. Hannah Rottschäfer got Bethel involved in a project called Hand2 Hand which puts food in the kids' lockers on Thursdays so they will have food for the weekends. Much of the food can be sourced from organizations in the area, but Bethel members also provide food for this during the school year. Church members help in packing the food and bringing it to the schools.

Nycole Kragt is involved with students at The Bridge Youth Center and sees how kids often feel lonely and upset. She started a project called Sunshine Boxes where boxes made up of things in yellow and bright colors can be given to someone who needs some brightness in their life. There is a room designated for this and anyone who wants to lift someone up can make up a Sunshine Box for them.

Thirty years ago, a large building called The Bridge Youth Center was added to First CRC facing Main Street. It was designated as a place for young teens to meet after school for tutoring, food, games and a place for kids to talk to adults about issues in their lives.

Bethel along with many other churches became a sponsor. Pastor Jon and several other men and women from Bethel have become very involved as mentors or just sharing time with the kids. Several times a year, a community dinner is held at Bethel for church members and kids to eat and interact. Bethel people provide the meals. Nycole Kragt started to go there as a mentor and is now on the staff.

The Dylan Compagner Bass Fishing Tournament has been held for the past six years to honor Dylan, a Bethel member and avid bass fisherman, who died in an automobile accident. Dan De Haan and other members have grilled hamburgers, etc. for the fisherman and guests to eat after the tournament is over.

Pastor Dan Kinnas offered a \$10 Challenge to someone who would take it and use it to bless someone during the week. This was done every Sunday morning for six or seven years and was discontinued in 2024.

Restoration Church

Restoration Church of Zeeland held their meetings in the gym of The Bridge Youth Center. In 2022, The Bridge requested that they find another place to worship, as they need the space for their activities. The church membership at Bethel was dwindling so Restoration was given the invitation to join us. We met together for six weeks. But the styles of worship were not compatible. The decision was made for Bethel to hold their service at 9:15am and Restoration at 10:30am. Occasionally joint worship services are held. During the week, we work together in ministries and other activities to advance God's kingdom.

Sports

About 50 years ago Bethel organized a Men's fastpitch softball team. The members had to be 16 years or older to play. Evan Broekhuis played on the team. Arnie Blauwkamp was the coach. The games were played at the American Legion Field on Centennial Street.

Later the men switched to slow pitch softball. Del Arendsen was a pitcher. He played ball until he was 66 years old. Evan later joined the team. He is still pitching at 67 years old. He hopes to keep on playing. Steve Dykema has been the catcher for many years.

Bethel had a women's softball team that played on the field on the south side of the Zeeland Cemetery where the Veteran's Field of Honor is today. Arnie Blauwkamp was their coach. The team eventually broke up but some women got together to play volleyball.

The men's team still play, but they are augmented by men from other churches or areas of town. They play on a field north of town.

Several women have had walking teams that walked around town or on trails. They even climbed Mt. Pisgah, the stairs on the dunes at Holland State Park.

A few years ago several couples got together and had a kickball team. Brian Van Hoven was the coach.

Miscellaneous

Our first offerings were taken in woven baskets that were donated to us. Andy Steenwyk made some wooden plates. Later Ben Mellema made the plates that we use today.

In 1952 the men's society asked the council to put a ban on smoking in our church building. It was decided to permit smoking in the boiler room.

In 1960 a microphone system was installed so that if the minister's laryngitis returned, he would be able to be heard.

The final total for the first building phase was \$95,910.00.

Leon Brummel was the first person to make profession of faith. He was also the first Bethel member to go into the Korean War.

In 1950 the first budget was \$2.00 per week. The next year it was raised to \$2.50 and in 1953 was raised to \$3.00.

Many women belonged to the Christian School Circle. They had many fundraisers which were usually successful. But one was a flop – they only made \$6.00.

In 1971 a new Baldwin piano was given to the church by the John Holstege and Tom De Haan families.

In 1973 Bethel began to publish a newsletter which came out approximately every two months. Karen Meyer was in charge of the editing. In 1974 the name Bethel Happenings was approved for its name. Later it was changed to the Reflections.

In 1977 the decision was made to use grape juice rather than wine at our communion services.

Bethel's first pictorial directory came out in 1984.

One Sunday one of our ministers had to preach wearing red tennis shoes and sat on a stool because his feet were badly burned while fishing with bare feet in shallow water.

In 1956 on April 8 a special collection was taken during the evening service to help the tornado victims from the Hudsonville area. Soon after that the council adopted a plan whereby church services would be cancelled if warnings were issued an hour before the services. One Sunday evening, a warning was issued when most people were already on their way to church. It was announced that we would hold our service, and that Al Walters would sit by the west door and watch the sky.

Over 600 people have been members of Bethel at one time or another.

Approximately 7,600 sermons have been preached from our pulpit.

At one time Bethel sponsored a refugee family. A home was rented for them. The council had a problem with the owner, and he threatened Rev. Vanden Heuvel. One Sunday he came to church. The front pew was filled but he made the Earl Bowman family all squeeze together so he could sit there. When Rev. Vanden Heuvel saw him, he turned pale. The Zeeland Police were called, and they stood in the narthex during the entire service. When the offering was taken, he tried to knock the plate out of Dan De Haan's hand, but he pulled his hand back. The man was told that the police were called. He kept looking back to see if they were still there. They were, so nothing else happened.

Bethel Church is people, and it takes many people and their talents to keep it going. We have willing workers. When a call for help is given members willingly respond. When the parsonage was updated and painted before Pastor Dan and Liz moved in, 30 members helped in whatever way they could.

We are blessed by members who cut the grass and plow the snow, drivers who pick up members so they can come to church, musicians who use their instruments and voices in praise time, those who provided regular maintenance

on the church and parsonage, people who provided child-care in the nursery. Others provided food for church or outreach projects, Kids Hope and VBS volunteers, those who plow up the garden for food plots, set up and maintain the ice rink in the winter. Many people worked in the library, served coffee, grew pumpkins for the pumpkin paints for Kids Hope kids. Council members, Sunday School and Catechism leaders, Youth Group leaders, leaders of Cadets and GEMS, prayer warriors—and more that I may have missed.

Through our offerings we were able to maintain our church, parsonage, and property. We supported many missionaries, denominational causes, and local outreach opportunities.

Has Bethel been blessed by God? Yes! Has Bethel been a blessing? Yes!

To God be the Glory!



Bethel Church | Zeeland, Michigan