

History of the North Branch Wesleyan Church (Former Pilgrim Holiness Church)

First Worship Building above Otto Henn's Harness Shop, May 1933, in Downtown North Branch



Reverend A.M. Frink, District Superintendent of the Pilgrim Holiness Church was present at the Friday evening prayer-meeting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Leland Miller. He spoke from the thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy, later sharing a few remarks concerning the Pilgrim Holiness Church. On Saturday, May 7, 1933 he spoke at both the morning and evening services of the small gathering and on Monday, May 8, 1933 the North Branch Pilgrim Holiness Church was organized with fifteen charter members. They were Reverend and Mrs. Burton Ferris, Mr. & Mrs. Carl Schmidt, Mr. & Mrs. Clarence Blackmore, Mrs. Bert Townsend, Mrs. Clarence Blackmore, Mr. Leland Miller, Mr. Elgin Smith, Mr. Ernest Peet, Mr. Tom Evans, Miss Laura Smith, Miss Dorothy Smith and Miss Margaret Schmidt. The first officers in the new church were:

Sunday School Superintendent
Leland Miller

Church Secretary
Tom Evans

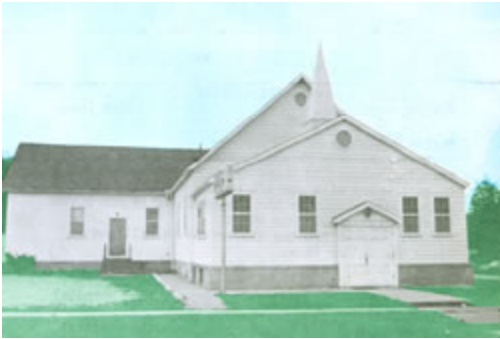
Elders
Clarence Blackmore
Elgin Smith

Deacons
Mrs. Clarence Sterling
Mr. Ernest Peet

Trustees
Carl Schmidt
Elgin Smith
Leland Miller

Our first business meeting was held on Friday evening, May 26, 1933 at which time we decided to buy a piano from Mr. Robert Elliot for twenty-two dollars and fifty cents (\$22.50), to be paid at a rate of one dollar per month. We were worshipping upstairs over Otto Henn's Harness Shop and it was decided to buy wallpaper to redecorate the hall. The first annual meeting was held February 7, 1934 with Reverend Burton Ferris recalled for another year.

On March 23, 1935 at our second annual meeting Reverend Wilbur Thorpe was called as our new pastor. He received a unanimous call. Ernest Peet was appointed on May 6, 1935 as our First Youth President. Under Reverend Thorpe's leadership the first parsonage was purchased and our new church was built. The building was 30' x 30'. All labor was donated and on March 16, 1941 the first meeting was held in our new church.



The Pilgrim Holiness Church
Downtown North Branch
First meeting held March 16, 1941

In 1942, Reverend J. A. Hiatt came to pastor the flock. A love offering was taken in March of 1944 and two lots east of the church were purchased. The lumber from an old barn on one of these lots was used to put an addition of twenty feet on the back of the church. In June, 1944 the original mortgage of thirty-five hundred dollars was paid off. 1945 was the year our first church bus, a Model A, was purchased for a total of one-hundred two dollars and fifty cents (\$102.50). In 1947 the old parsonage was sold and a new parsonage was purchased for fifty-five hundred dollars.

Reverend A.F. Osborn was called to pastor our church. The Osborns were truly people who prayed in every need, no matter how large or small. Under their faithful ministry, our church family continued to grow. Reverend J.H. Kotesky moved his family into the parsonage in 1952. The church was suffering growing pains and during his stay with us a new 30' x 30' annex was added.

August of 1955 welcomed Reverend Wilbert Walker and his family to the church family here. His first winter here, the parsonage basement was completely remodeled and an oil furnace was installed. During the spring and summer of 1959 a new vestibule 16' x 30' was constructed at the church and in 1961, the church basement was remodeled into much needed Sunday School rooms.

In July, 1962 Reverend James Kreider's family arrived to become our parsonage family. Under Brother Kreider's leadership, Junior Church was started with Mrs. Kreider and Rose Mathews taking this responsibility. The living room and dining room in the parsonage was covered with new carpeting.

Reverend and Mrs. Bruce White felt God's call and moved to North Branch in July 1966. A contest for a "Mile of Pennies" was collected to buy a new organ which was dedicated December 4, 1967. A building fund was also started and two thousand dollars (\$2,000.00) was raised. Estimates were figured for an addition on the old church building.

In 1968, Reverend Ronald Schmidt and family moved into the Jefferson Street parsonage. The lot south of the parsonage was cleared for a parking lot and the parsonage got a new aluminum siding job. In May, 1969 Brother George Byers gave six acres of ground on M-90 to the church. In 1971 an additional six acres were purchased and in March 1971 we received sketches of church types. In April, 1971 a fund raising project raised sixty-thousand dollars (\$60,000) in pledges and cash. August, 1971 was the month work began on our present church building and as Nehemiah 4:6-- "the people had a mind to work." Many long hours were put in by pastor and people and on November 4, 1973 this building was dedicated to the glory of God. ISN'T GOD GOOD?

It should be mentioned that in 1968 there was a Merging Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Pilgrim Holiness Church and the name THE WESLEYAN CHURCH was adopted.

Reverend Ronald Schmidt had a burden for a new Christian Academy in this area with the facilities of the new church this could be a reality. At the church's annual meeting a unanimous vote was given by the membership to start the school. More hard work to bring the west wing of the church up to code was tackled by the people of the church. In the fall of 1976 grades K-12 started with twenty-three students. Larry Curell was called to be the school administrator.

Pastor and Mrs. W. N. Miller came to shepherd the flock in 1978. Under his leadership the church parking lot was black-topped, a bus garage was erected and the much needed first phase of our school building was started. One more time God's people rolled up their sleeves and many long hours were put in. The building was open for use for the 1982-83 school year. We had two-hundred nine students enrolled.

Pastor John W. Davis, with his wife, Corinne, and family of five moved into the parsonage of the church in 1982. They endeared themselves to us, and the community, the day they moved in. During the Davis pastorate the church enjoyed a steady period of growth both spiritually and numerically. Corinne's gift of musical ability was a special blessing to the congregation as she shared her talents on the organ each week. The family moved into a new church parsonage during their ministry with us. The congregation purchased a beautiful home just three doors away from the church. The home featured a large living room, dining room and family room, three bedrooms and two baths. A very large basement allowed two additional bedrooms to be added. Pastor Davis, or "Pappy", as he came to be known among many of the children, was a very caring and energetic pastor. His preaching and teaching brought great encouragement and faith to those who attended services. Pastor Davis was not only a great preacher; he was a talented basketball player and coach. During the pastorate he coached the girls' basketball team at North Branch Wesleyan Academy.

The academy continued to expand and reach new families with Christian education. In January of 1987 the church board hired the first youth pastor, Rev. Dale Parsons. Dale had been teaching at the academy since the previous fall. He joined the staff of the church part-time as Pastor Davis's assistant, and youth pastor. All too soon the Davis pastorate drew to a close after six years of ministry with us. We thank God for His blessings to us through Pastor Davis's family and ministry.

Pastor Ralph L. Oden and his wife, Esther, moved into the parsonage in 1988. Pastor Oden was a dear man who taught us to love the Lord. The Odens lived an example of humble trust in the Lord before the congregation. Pastor Oden will always be appreciated as a man of solid confidence and faith in our loving God. During the Oden pastorate the academy entered another building phase and several new classrooms were added. We thank the Lord for all He did among us while Rev. Oden was our pastor. In 1994 Pastor Oden retired after many years of ministry. The Odens moved to Marion, Indiana.

Pastor Richard J. Stevens, with his wife, Jan, and children, Janelle and Joshua, accepted the call to pastor the church in 1994. Pastor Rick was an intelligent and enthusiastic preacher who encouraged his listeners to reach higher in their faith in God. This was a time of challenge and stretching for the academy and for the church. God was calling us to think in new ways and reach beyond a level of comfort we had known. Another building program was undertaken by the academy to continue on a path of growth and expansion. Many new classrooms, new library, and a new office complex were part of the new plans. We thank the Lord together for bringing Pastor Rick and Jan, and their family, to us. We appreciate all they did in their ministry to us for the Kingdom in pastoral care.

Pastor Dale R. Parsons was called to be the senior pastor of the church in 1996. Pastor Dale, with his wife, Mary, and four children moved into the parsonage in August. It was easy for the Parsons's to enter back into the life of the church, having been here as youth pastors eight years before. Pastor Dale believed in the ministry of the Body of Christ. He endeavored to build confidence in the people to use their many gifts God has given them for benefit of the church. A common phrase he used when someone had an idea about ministry was, "Make it happen!" The Parsons family is very musical and we enjoyed some great choir concerts. Pastor Dale directed a community choir that included everyone in our own church choir. A Christmas concert was performed in North Branch to raise money for needy families. During his years as pastor of the church, Pastor Dale also served as Assistant District Superintendent of East Michigan, district board member, Chairman of the District Board of Ministerial Development, and frequent writer for Vista: Journal for Holy Living, and

Sunday school curriculum published by the Wesleyan Church.

One of the major projects undertaken during this time was the incorporation of North Branch Wesleyan Academy. The academy ministry, begun in 1976, became Wesleyan Christian Academy, an independent ministry, in 2001. We continue to thank the Lord for blessing us with the academy and look forward to growth in Christian education.

Another major project was the complete renovation of our present facility. The entire sanctuary was completely renewed with structural changes on the platform, new carpet and upholstery, and new curtains. Some classrooms were rebuilt and new carpeting was laid throughout. We thank God for all those who worked many hours to complete the projects.

In 1999 Pastor Brian Hart joined the staff as the youth pastor. Pastor Brian added an energetic ministry to the young people of our church and community. Mission trips, national youth conferences, local projects and ministry were all a part of our youth ministry with Pastor Brian.

In 2003 Pastor Martin Bigley joined the staff of the church. Pastor Martin, with many years of ministry experience, brought a real heart of caring ministry to our shut-ins and to other seniors in our congregation. We thank the Lord for His gift to us in the Bigley family.

It is the Body of Christ, its members living in daily faith in Christ, that makes the Church function as it should. Christ is living in all who are born again and it is He Who lives through each of us to reach the world. Let us continue to serve Him faithfully.

In 2004 Pastor Peter Damaska was called to be Senior Pastor. With youthful enthusiasm and apparent pastoral gifts God is using him to lead the church in this latest chapter of effective ministry.

In 2005 Pastor Tony Parsons joined the staff of the church, assuming the role of Pastor of Student Ministries. His easy personality and strong leadership gifts have brought an exciting vitality to the youth ministry program. Following three solid years of ministry, Pastor Tony and his family moved from NBWC to continue in Youth Ministry in North Carolina.

As 2008 progressed we were pleased to welcome Pastor Josh Hilty and his wife, Jamie. After many years of having a Youth Pastor on-staff the leadership made a decision to hire Pastor Josh as Pastor of Discipleship with oversight responsibilities of the leaders and volunteers of children, youth and adult ministries.