



## Reflections of Yesterday

Martin Ashley, Church  
Historian

During the late 1950's and early 1960's, First Church was busy helping to start two sister mission churches. Plans were conceived in 1957 for the formation of a church in the Lakeview area of southern Battle Creek. In 1958, the Westlake Presbyterian Church was officially chartered. Several years later, Pennfield Presbyterian Church was organized to provide a church in the northern part of the city.

At the Annual Congregational Meeting in January of 1960, "Dr. Weenink announced the new potential church site in Pennfield township. The Board of Church Extension is securing this property which they believe to be the best potential site that they have known. A Minister to work in this site will be on our staff, however the Board of Church Extension will assume financial responsibility while First Church will assume other responsibilities in helping to organize the new Church."

The following excerpts from letters written by the Rev. Robert F. Langwig, organizing minister for the new Pennfield church, help to tell the story.

Dear Friends:

June 29, 1960

*A Presbyterian Church for the Pennfield area is fast becoming a definite reality. I am writing now to give you the first of many reports on progress being made. Please feel free to share this information with your neighbors and friends.*

*A site for the church has been purchased on the corner of Capital Avenue N.E. and St. Mary's Lake Road. On this property is the former Hicks School building which will be used for worship services and meetings. The Grange located next door will be used for Church School. Work days have found us preparing the grounds and the buildings for worship services and Sunday School purposes. There has been much accomplished through painting, plumbing, electrical, heating, and gardening work. There is still need for more voluntary work.*

*First Presbyterian Church has shared with us a goodly amount of manpower and equipment. They have given to us pianos, hymnals, chairs, tables, and other necessary items. The Westlake Presbyterian Church has given us choir robes and a pulpit. Many individuals are also giving their time and talents on special projects . . .*

Another letter from September 1960 shares the following details on the new church,

Dear Friends

*The Presbyterian Church in Pennfield will begin its services of worship next Sunday, September 11, at*

11 :00 a.m., in the former Hicks school building on the corner of Capital Avenue N.E. and St. Mary's Lake Road. It is not often that we have the opportunity to be a part of the very beginning of a church. Let me, therefore, invite you to what may be a new experience in your life. Because we are a mission church and do not have all the facilities that we would like to possess, we will hold Sunday School classes at 9:30 a.m. There will be classes available for those of toddler age through adult age . . . But as a mission church we can feel very proud of the facilities that we do possess. We begin with greater resources than most mission churches. We have buildings that we may use for worship services and Sunday School; we have seven and one-half acres of centrally located property; and we have most of the equipment that is necessary for Sunday School. One thing that we do lack, however, are toys for the younger children. It would be appreciated if you could bring a toy which could be left with the Sunday School for the usage of the younger children. These toys should be of a constructive nature, and story books would be most welcome. Parking facilities are available all around the church building, and the Swift Homes has given us permission to use their area for parking.

Services were well attended in the old school house over the next several months and it was decided to formally organize a church in this location on March 5, 1961. The following resolution was drafted by the Session of Pennfield Presbyterian in June 1961 thanking First Church for its generosity,

*"Be it resolved that all generations who come to worship and learn of the Lord in The Pennfield Presbyterian Church know that this church, organized on March 5, 1961, was begun as a mission project of the members of*

*the First Presbyterian Church.*

*Be it further resolved that all generations who come to worship and learn of the Lord in The Pennfield Presbyterian Church know that we owe a special gratitude to The Rev.*

*Allen J. Weenink, minister of The First Presbyterian Church, and its staff for their unceasing labors on our behalf.*

*Be it resolved that on this seventh day of June, 1961, that we commend the Session of The First Presbyterian Church for their fine judgement and sensitivity in mission and extend them our thanks."*



Rev. Langwig at the front door of Pennfield Presbyterian Church in 1960.