

Reflections of Yesteryear

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Church Historian



Change can come unexpectedly in the Presbyterian Church when a minister announces to his/her congregation that he/she has accepted a call to another church. Such was the case for First Church in the summer of 1957.

The following headline appeared on the church page of the May 28, 1957 issue of the Enquirer and News, "Rev. Garner Called To New Pastorate." The Rev. J. Herbert Garner came in February of 1951 to serve as pastor of First Church upon the retirement of the Rev. N. Dan Braby in December of 1950. He served our church for six years, aiding in the continued growth of our congregation and updating of the church facility. The article in the Enquirer and News told of Rev. Garner's call as follows, "Battle Creek is about to lose one of its most prominent and popular pastors, the Rev. J. Herbert Garner of the First Presbyterian Church, who will go to the First Presbyterian Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma, the location of the Oklahoma State University. The Garners expect to leave about the middle of August. While no strictly official announcement can be made at this time, the events which will make the change official are, from here on in, mostly just a matter of adhering to form. Specifically, the Rev. Mr. Garner has received a call to the new church which has a tremendous "Westminster"

youth program, since there are 10,000 students at the nearby university. At a meeting at the church here on June 9, following the 11 a.m. worship service, the congregation will act on concurring with Mr. Garner in requesting the Lansing Presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relations here. Details of the change will be worked out following the meeting of the Presbytery on June 11. Given official sanction, Mr. Garner will take up his new duties about September 1. Mr. Garner received national recognition last December when Time Magazine reported on his recorded messages, "Just A Half A Minute," which he has been presenting since September 19, 1955. Financed through the church, these recorded inspirational messages can be heard 24 hours a day by dialing the number WO2-9533. Since the first of July last year, the 30-second inspirational messages have been printed daily on the editorial pages of the Enquirer and News, and last December Mr. Garner published a book containing a year's collection of the messages. The telephone service, the first of its kind ever offered in Michigan, and a pioneer effort in a steadily growing trend throughout the world, was suggested to Mr. Garner by I. V. Packard of the FCDA, who had heard a similar program in Baltimore. The messages are kept in a general vein quite deliberately, in order to be beneficial to members of all faiths. When they were started, Mr. Garner expected that after the novelty had worn off the number of calls would taper off accordingly. But the opposite has been true. So fast has the word spread and so constant and increasing are the calls, that additional electronic equipment was installed by the Michigan Bell Telephone Co. in a special basement recording room. Capable of receiving 2,000 calls per day, the equipment is generally busy at all hours. Coming here from the Old Stone

Church in Cleveland, Mr. Gamer has been pastor of the First Presbyterian Church for the past seven years. His longest previous pastorate was at the Sixth Presbyterian Church in Washington D.C., where he served for 10 years. His other pastorates include Cochranton, Brownsville and Philadelphia in Pennsylvania.”

The following excerpts are from a letter written by Rev. Gamer to the Board of Deacons, dated October 23, 1957, sharing some thoughts about his new church in Stillwater, *“The letter that you asked Maurice to write was just another wonderful expression of the fine Christian Fellowship that you men always showed while we were with you in Battle Creek. Please know that all of us deeply appreciated it, and above all the spirit of Christian affection and loyalty that inspired it from your hearts... the work here has turned out to be even more challenging than we ever expected. At least half of our Church members are faculty members, including the President and two Vice Presidents of this fine University, and the other half is made up of all kinds of business and professional people. Then on Sunday Mornings, your hearts would be thrilled to see the Church filled with students from the University. The deacons here - 44 in number - are inviting the University students to take the offering, beginning this Sunday, and last night sponsored a work night, such as you men did, and accomplished a surprising number of things.. You and your families, and our many other fine friends in the Church, will always have a special place in our hearts and prayers, and may God bless you all in every way, in Christ. Continue in the spirit of Christ, and grow in His grace and service.”*



The Rev. J. Herbert Garner circa 1950

Photo from the Church Archives

East Lansing Welcomes Margie Osborn

It is with joy that we announce that Margie Osborn, former staff member and Stephen Ministry Coordinator here, will be installed as the Senior Pastor of Eastminster Presbyterian Church in East Lansing on Sunday, September 18, at 4:00 p.m. You may send notes of congratulation to her at the church, 1315 Abbott Road, East Lansing, MI, 48823.