

In the Beginning

In 1901, presbytery met in Ewart, Iowa, where the Rev. William W. Woodburn, of Ewart, and the Rev. John Ferguson, of Newton, were appointed to explore the possibility of establishing a new church in a nearby college town. In the spring of 1902, the two ministers canvassed the neighborhoods of Grinnell and found not only a friendly, but an eager welcome. Having received several subscriptions from Grinnell residents and many Grinnell College students indicating their potential membership, Woodburn also received pledges totaling \$100 for the first year of the church. He recorded his response in what was to be the session book for the new church, saying, “It was found that while there were seven church organizations in the city, there were but three; vis, Congregationalist, Methodist Episcopal and Baptist that seemed to be progressive. There appeared to be a large class of neglected ones, yet, who were hungering for the Gospel.”¹

Hoping to offer “the pure Gospel” to the “poorer classes,”² Woodburn and Ferguson applied to the Home Mission Board for a starting loan of \$500, to be used toward the establishment of a new Presbyterian church in Grinnell, Iowa. Appointed the pastor of this newborn congregation, Woodburn searched for a meeting place and found the Armory, which was at that time located on the south side of Fourth Street, just west of the railroad tracks. Lillian Woodburn would much later recall the incredibly early mornings she and her husband spent scrubbing the Armory floors of wax so that the church members would not slip and fall. Sacrifices had to be made until they could afford a more comfortable worship space. Signing a contract that would provide one year of rental, “including lighting, heating and janitor work” for \$225.00, Woodburn admitted to a bit of trepidation, knowing that a source had not yet been identified for such money, but trusting “that God would provide a way.”³

Woodburn writes of the first public meeting:

Sabbath July 20, 1902 was to be “opening day.” There was need of advertising but what would we advertise, - preaching only or also Sabbath School? In such a position one can only trust God and go forward. Hence when the [hand]bills appeared they bore the following: -

¹ Session Records, April 1902

² Session Records, April 1902

³ Session Records, July 1902

10 A.M. Sabbath School
 11 A.M. Preaching
 7 P.M. Young People's Meeting
 8 P.M. Preaching

The eventful day arrived. How we had waited and prayed for that day. As the Sabbath School hour drew on we were a little nervous. "What if nobody comes?" But soon our hearts were gladdened by seeing a number of children entering. There was a Sabbath School of [19 or] 21 [taught in two classes by the Woodburns, and their offering that day was \$0.45]; 34 at the preaching service..., and about 75 at the evening service. All this together with the feeling that the Lord was present with power, gladdened our hearts and brightened our way.⁴

The music for that service was given by the Woodburns, Eli Gregson, and Nellie Watson Gregson, and Emily Nelson (later Emily Hamilton) played the piano.

Financial support was soon to come. Twenty-five dollars mysteriously appeared from "an unknown friend in Shannon City, Iowa"⁵ along with \$1600 from the Board of Church Extension (for the church lot). Additionally, the Home Mission Board sent \$200 to supplement Woodburn's salary. Woodburn expressed his gratitude in the Session record:

I have mentioned these things as tokens of Jehovah's loving kindness. They are also written that, if in the days to come, clouds may gather about our beloved church, her people may dig down and find that her foundation is laid on the solid Rock and thus their hope be stayed on "Him who takes the lambs in his arms and carries them in his bosom."⁶

On September 13, 1902, the church formed its charter and was established as First United Presbyterian Church, Grinnell. The men and women who became the first official members of the church were Mrs. Lillian Woodburn (age 25), Margaret McKeag, Samuel McLean, Minnie McLean, Henry McLean, and Clarence McLean, who joined by letter of transfer. Joining by profession were Josephine Cox, Lillie Elliott, Mary McLean, and Harvey McLean. Samuel McLean was elected trustee.

Two months later, Woodburn used the \$1600 grant to purchase from the elderly Mrs. Columbia J. Propst lots 11 and 12 on the corner of Fifth Avenue and State Street, including a small alley. The church seemed to be building that foundation of "solid Rock" for which Woodburn had prayed. Before long, however, the congregation would be tested. The pastor

⁴ Session Records, July 20, 1902

⁵ Session Records, July 1902

wrote in his first Session record, “little did we know how dark clouds were gathering or how near they were at hand.”⁷

Dark Clouds

Moving from the Armory to the Salvation Army Hall to hold weekly revival services, Woodburn worked to build a solid and active congregation. He wrote, “This was a season of rich spiritual blessing. There was deep conviction of sin and a number of clear cases of conversion.”⁸ During those days, the congregation met in homes for afternoon prayer following the morning service and then returned to the Salvation Army Hall for evening prayer. Then, in late January, Woodburn contracted scarlet fever and was quarantined for three weeks.

While Woodburn remained medically banished from his congregation, “contention arose among the young people.... Matters speedily went from bad to worse, and when, at length, the pastor was free he found affairs in a deplorable state.”⁹ Feeling that there was some chance to resolve congregational dissent, Woodburn arranged special meetings in the Salvation Army Hall and asked the offending youths to meet with him separately to correct affairs. Writing of his own ordeal, Woodburn carefully states:

Two of these [youths] did not come. [I] waited a week and feeling the urgency of the occasion reluctantly sent letters of suspension to Minnie McLean and Margaret McKeag until they would come and make acknowledgment. The case had now become so plain and so widely known that a public confession was deemed necessary. The young ladies came and made confession and were reinstated.¹⁰

The subject of this scandal is unknown, but by March of that same year, both girls left the church. Minnie’s departure probably affected the church to a greater degree, however, as when she attempted to re-ignite the argument, her parents supported her defiance and eventually withdrew the entire family from the church. Thus within six months of the

⁶ Session Records, July 1902

⁷ Session Records, January 1903

⁸ Session Records, December 1902

⁹ Session Records, January 1903

¹⁰ Session Records, February 1903

church's official establishment, seven of its ten charter members, including the first church trustee, severed with the church.

Wondrous Blessing

Fortunately, the congregation remained devoted to its young roots, and church matters quickly began to improve. The Grinnell Y.P.C.U. (Young People's Christian Union) organized in March 1903, and in July, Children's Day was celebrated with 60 "scholars" of the Sabbath School classes. The church also moved out of its temporary quarters into a new \$1500 wood frame chapel on Fifth Avenue. Several members were received in the new chapel in September. Among those joining the church were Minnie McLean, Samuel McLean, Mrs. McLean, Henry, Clarence, Harvey, Lillie, Mary, and Mabel McLean. Having parted from the church with tension and ill will, they seemed to have reunited themselves with the congregation without further ado. Margaret McKeag would reunite with the church, as well, after two years of separation.

On December 8, 1903, the Board of Church Extension granted the congregation \$100 toward payment for the new chapel. Feeling grateful for the unexpected monetary gift in a tight time, and feeling a "special need in spiritual work" after fifteen months of rocky, but rapidly improving congregational relations, Woodburn "set apart Sabbath Jan 3rd 1904 as a day of prayer and fasting with the following order of services:

9 A.M. Prayer for Cleansing
 10 A.M. Sabbath School
 11 A.M. Preaching
 12 Prayer for Power
 1:30-3 How to bring souls to Christ
 3-4:30 Prayer for the unsaved
 4:30-6 Bible study on Personal Work
 6:30-7:30 Y.P.C.U.
 7:30-8:30 Preaching
 8:30-9 Prayer."¹¹

¹¹ Session Records, January 3, 1904

Despite the notable and unusual lack of food, “quite a number remained at the Chapel the entire day and a wondrous blessing was received....From the very beginning the Power was present and a number gave their hearts to Jesus.”¹²

Every member of a congregation offers distinct gifts and qualities to a church. Only a random few will ever see their names in its history, however, for certain interesting characteristics. Several of the early members of this church were immigrants from Scotland and Ireland. In July 1905, James Craig, Isabella Stevenson, and Grace Elizabeth Craid came from Presbyterian churches in Saintfield, Ireland. Nine months later, fellow townswoman Margaret McRoberts followed a similar path. John and Sarah Peak also came from Saintfield, Ireland in 1911, and that same year, Jane A. Beattie arrived from a Presbyterian church in Scotland. Not until 1922 did the congregation again record immigrant members. Robert, Martha and Margaret Campbell and Mr. And Mrs. J. M. Smith of Belfast, Ireland joined the church in March. Under much different circumstances, Mr. John W. Gilbert might also be remembered for briefest church membership. Gilbert joined on April 24, 1904, but died only eight days later.

A Larger Space

Revival meetings and regular Sabbath worship continued in the chapel and in the parsonage during some of the colder winter days until May 28, 1906, when a building committee was formed to plan a larger place of worship. The new church was planned to be 40 by 60 feet in dimension and colonial in style. Proudfoot and Bird of Des Moines designed the church, and Robert G. Coutts, a local Scottish immigrant, was contracted to build the church. A mason by trade, Coutts had recently made his mark on the town by constructing over half of the town's buildings and aiding the college in its expansions. He received brick, cement and stone in large shipments on the train, and he built both the new Presbyterian church and a new Armory (now Pagliai's Pizza parlor on Fourth Avenue) in 1907. Coutts lived in his self-constructed home at 1201 Hamilton Avenue and spent his Sunday mornings serving as a Sunday School teacher for one of the churches in town.

¹² Session Records, January 3, 1904

At some point between the 1902 charter ceremony and the 1907 church construction, a parsonage was built for Woodburn, his wife Lillian, and their children Lois, Willard, and Paul. The manse was quite unique for its time, as it sported a garage for Woodburn's Model T Ford. Few Grinnellians at this time would have owned an automobile, and even fewer would have had a full garage for its storage. A telephone was also installed, and Woodburn's congregation could call him at number 403.

The new building plans inspired a lively church spirit that made itself visible in many forms. Members were encouraged to make "a little spare time for a good cause." To raise money and enthusiasm, "a commission of 20 percent or ten cents on every fifty cent subscription [was paid] to those securing subscriptions to *The Gospel Messenger*,"¹³ which was an early monthly church publication. Each week, Woodburn himself set the type on a hand press to print the *Messenger* and all the other bulletins.

Scholarly Support

One of the church groups to become extremely active during those years was the Sabbath School. Until October 1906, the children's Bible classes had been separated and labeled according to age group in chronological order. In a streak of creativity, however, the groups decided that they no longer wanted to be called "1," "2," "3," etc. The Sabbath School scholars officially changed their names to "Stars," "Sunbeams," "Daniels," "Light Bearers," "Willing Workers," "Gideons," "Kings," "Daughters," "Young Men's Class," and "Bible Class."¹⁴ Later added to the group was the "Over-the-Top" Bible class.

To inspire more active involvement in the scholarly ranks, "rewards were given for perfect and punctual attendance."¹⁵ Carl Hutchinson, Superintendent of the Sabbath School, organized a paper automobile race. The children were divided into two teams – Red and Blue – and each team would get a certain number of points for good attendance, moving their cars up a paper "mountain" according to the number of points they had received. The "losing" team had to treat the "winning" team. In December of that same year, the students made a

¹³ *The Gospel Messenger*, October 21, 1906

¹⁴ Sabbath School, October 7, 1906

¹⁵ Sabbath School, October 7, 1906

considerable donation to the building fund, and a tribute to their generosity was displayed in the Sabbath School “Memorial Window” for some time.

Jane and Sadie McKeag’s favorite Sabbath School activity was the annual picnic. One year, it was at Tama Park, with Missionaries Mr. and Mrs. R. G. Smith hosting both the Grinnell Presbyterian Sabbath School and the Smiths’ Sabbath School of Indian Scholars. The children ate dinner, played games and baseball, and visited the mission station. Herbert Hutchinson lent the Sabbath School his truck for transportation. Not all children could take advantage of the strong youth programs at the church, however. Lacking advanced medicine, children were frequently at risk of death from various illnesses and infections. *The Gospel Messenger* lists the deaths of several infants under the heading “Gleanings of the Heavenly Reaper,”¹⁶ and a newsletter from this time announces that “Little Arnold Learned died of diptheria and was burried yesterday afternoon [sic].”¹⁷

“Who will be the next to give? Is He speaking to YOU?”¹⁸

Struggling with finances, the congregation worked steadily to complete the new building. Before the church was completed, “it was decided that it would add greatly to [the face bricks’] appearance if they were chipped.”¹⁹ However, there was some difficulty in finding the labor to produce such an effect. *The Gospel Messenger* relays this difficulty, stating, “finally we found one of the masons who was willing to undertake the job. He tried it for half a day and then said, ‘No ‘nough money chip brick.’”²⁰ The problem was solved when “like all other work, we had to call on the ladies to help finish.”²¹ The women’s work was efficient and effective, and their services were more or less willingly donated.

Full of spirit, the congregation again held revival meetings in the winter of 1907. *Our Church Tidings* from February describe one meeting in detail, including the following:

¹⁶ *The Gospel Messenger*, January 1906

¹⁷ *Our Church Tidings*, October 14, 1906

¹⁸ *The Gospel Messenger*, July 1905

¹⁹ *The Gospel Messenger*, July 1905

²⁰ *The Gospel Messenger*, July 1905

²¹ *The Gospel Messenger*, August, 1905

In the evening the text was:- “Ye must be born again.” This is a personal change, a necessary change, a radical change, a perceptible change. Have you experienced the change?

The sermon was followed by an inspiring testimony meeting in which many told of time and place and circumstances of their birth into the Kingdom of God. The thrilling accounts brought tears to the eyes and were as coals of fire.²²

The youth were also asked to think of ways in which they could give themselves to God. A Y.P.C.U. meeting in July featured the topic “How our lives may be consecrated to our country.”²³

The new church was dedicated in January 1908, having been built for \$4500. In September of 1908, Woodburn held special revival services, assisted by Professor McClelland. He reported high attendance with “good results.” The focus of these revival services was just as much financial as it was spiritual. Solidly in debt, Session began to talk about raising \$600 in the coming year to help repay debts on church construction, repairs, and the pastor’s salary. A blackboard, mounted on one of the outside columns of the new church, was used to mark progress and to advertise upcoming church services and events. *Gospel Messenger* subscriptions were again circulated around town. Woodburn planned more revival services, and Session agreed to find another pastor to help him in these services. During the April 1910 revival services, the Men’s Meetings planned programs on “Ups and Downs of a Railroad Man” and “Thou art The Man.”²⁴

The church’s efforts to increase church interest and membership succeeded. Between 1909 and 1911, the membership climbed from 59 to 83, and by 1910 there were 113 children enrolled in Sabbath School, with ten teachers managing ten classes. The Y.P.C.U. also continued to receive active interest. In early January 1910, “the young people had a bob ride out to Mr. Ralph Rutherford’s and spent a delightful evening in their home.”²⁵ Woodburn started an evening sermon series in September 1910 entitled “The Gospel in Unread Books.” In the September 11 newsletter, he advertised the first of the sermons, encouraging his congregation to “look for a verse in Hosea and give it tonight” as “the sermon

²² *Our Church Tidings*, February 7, 1907

²³ *Our Church Tidings*, July 7, 1907

²⁴ *Our Church Tidings*, April 1910

²⁵ *Our Church Tidings*, January 16, 1910

will be preceded by Scripture quotations from memory.”²⁶ Sabbath School attendance was once again addressed in another newsletter:

The new badges will be distributed today. The silver badges are very pretty. There may be some pupils disappointed in not receiving badges but the requirements are very plain: Be present thirteen consecutive Sabbaths. If you do not receive one today keep up heart and try again, and when won your gold badge will have a value it could not have had otherwise.²⁷

While attendance was doing well, the church’s financial situation continued to trouble the Session. Professors Ryan and Lyman agreed to coordinate “Elocutionary and Musical Entertainment...for the benefit of the building fund on Wednesday evening, March 30” to help pay off debts from the manse and church construction.²⁸ Their efforts brought in \$129.79 from the congregation. A man by the name of Mr. McClure, an evangelist and a train engineer, came to the church several times to preach and lead prayer meetings. “Engineer McClure” was honored for a significant building fund donation and “was presented with an umbrella as a token of the love and esteem of the congregation.”²⁹ Later that year, the *Tidings* announced, “it is certainly very gratifying to be able to report the salary paid to full and a little balance over. With a little effort we can keep it so.”³⁰

On October 15, 1912, Woodburn resigned from his position, and Lillie, Lois, and Willard were given their letters of transfer. The next month, the congregation decided that they would like to call a settled pastor, not a supply pastor. Session made a suggestion that the new minister’s salary should be raised.

Session also began to look for a place for prayer meetings, and later reported that “such services that are held on Sabbath be held at Uncle Sam’s Club House.”³¹ Winter Sabbath services and church meetings continued to be held in the parsonage because the church had run out of funds to repair the furnace, and *Messenger* subscriptions were barely covering the cost of ministerial supply.

²⁶ *Our Church Tidings*, September 11, 1910

²⁷ *Our Church Tidings*, October 9, 1910

²⁸ *Our Church Tidings*, March 20, 1910

²⁹ *Our Church Tidings*, April 17, 1910

³⁰ *Our Church Tidings*, September 11, 1910

³¹ Congregational Meeting, December 1912

On March 30, 1913, the United Presbyterian Church made a formal call for the Rev. W. R. Lawrence, and he was later installed on September 24, 1913.

Two members were officially reprimanded in 1915. Mr. Jessie Hughes was suspended for adultery in April. At another point, when Mr. Maxwell McCosh asked for his letter of transfer, he was “given a certificate in good and regular standing up to [March] 1914 with the statement that he had been neglecting the Ordinances since that time.” It was common practice to record individual attendance for each Communion alongside the annual role of members. Absence from regular observance of the ordinance was frowned upon, and McCosh’s next church most likely questioned him on his neglect, as noted in the letter of transfer.

When paying bills in 1915, it was determined that “old loose change should go to pay [the] light bill.” The church’s War [Emergency] Fund Committee reported a balance of \$27.18 in 1918. Six years later, the Committee would send \$6 for German Relief.

In November 1917, Mrs. Lawrence and her daughter, Lucille, were issued letters to Gurnsey, Iowa. Later that same year, Lawrence resigned from his position. Until the church could find another pastor, the Rev. John C. Lincoln, a prominent church member, would cover most Sunday pulpit supply. Session discussed the possibility of asking Woodburn to return to Grinnell for a \$780 salary. On July 21, 1918, Woodburn’s family returned, and he served the church once more.

Getting itself into deeper debt, but given no other choice, Session made a request to the Board of Church Extension to pay \$1500 on repairs and asked the Women’s Board for loan of \$1800. Although the Session hoped to get \$800 from the congregation to pay the pastor’s salary, it asked the pastor to pay \$400 of his salary, in place of rent charges, to the Women’s Board loan. Four years later, the Board of Church Extension gave the church a donation mortgage of \$4,748.88, freeing the church of all debt to that Board. That same year, having cleared most of its debt and therefore able to pay a higher salary of \$958.20 for a settled pastor, the church made a formal call for Woodburn, and membership promptly increased by twelve. The children were active, as well, for the 1923 Sabbath School offering totaled \$234.44. Around this time, Katherine A. Hill joined the church, and she would go on to do mission work in various parts of India, Africa, and the United States.

In the 1920s, the church realized the extent of the women's contribution to the life of the congregation and decided to get the men as involved as their wives and neighbors. Knowing that food would be sure bait, "a motion was made and carried that we invite all the men of the church to a little banquet and an oyster supper and an entertainment and try to interest them a little more in the church work."³² The supper was held on Dec 16, 1921, and about 20 men responded to the invitation. Some time later, "arrangements were made for a men's night to be the evening service on Sabbath evening"³³ and a father and son banquet was also arranged.

After having served the congregation for a total of 16 years, Woodburn resigned on December 29, 1924. Two years later, the Rev. J. I. Frederick was hired on a salary of \$1070. During Frederick's time, Sabbath School enjoyed an average attendance rate of 61 percent with its 134 enrolled scholars. With such high attendance and poor heating systems in the church, the Sabbath School had to pay \$68 for two tons of coal in those years.

In 1929, Frederick asked for two months vacation while he looked for another church, but he did not leave the Grinnell church until July 1, 1930. The church was fortunate to find a new pastor within two months of Frederick's resignation. The Rev. W. J. Stewart came from Oskaloosa and had a history of communication with the Grinnell church. While serving as the Synod Moderator, he had once written to Frederick:

Des Moines Presbytery

Dear Bro Frederick –

Enclosed find receipted note. Personally we rejoice in the success of the Grinnell folks. Now if they could shoulder each year a portion of the parsonage loan they would soon be able to be self sustaining.

You certainly did well with your Conservation offering.

When you burn the note please extend my congratulations to your flock.

Best wishes

Stewart

(S.M., Rev. W. J. Stewart, Oskaloosa)

(Moderator, J. E. McCall, Allerton)³⁴

Stewart had relieved the Grinnell church of one of its several loans, little knowing that he himself would soon be serving those dependent "Grinnell folks."

³² Session Records, December 5, 1921

³³ Session Records, October 21, 1925

³⁴ undated loose letter

During his fourth year in the church, Stewart reported to Session “74 sermons, 628 calls, 269 meetings, 7 funerals, [and] 101 members.” Stewart served the church during the difficult depression years, and in October 1932, Session reported, “considerable time was consumed in the discussion of the [unemployment] problem of our church members.”³⁵ To make sure the members were at least maintaining their spiritual lives if not their economic conditions, record attendance cards were passed out to monitor communion attendance.

Three years later, Stewart reported: “Discouragements: 2 members less, no baptisms, and no new members. Encouragements: 744 calls, 292 meetings not including Sabbath School, 3 couples married and 8 funerals.” It is interesting to note how Stewart regarded the eight funerals, having counted them among the “encouragements” he experienced for the year. Perhaps he suffered from fatigue at the time that he was writing his annual report.

In April 1942, several area ministers published a “mission statement” in the Herald Register:

We Believe the Church should be as a “voice in the wilderness” calling our people and our nation to higher and better things, directing their minds and their lives toward Christian brotherhood and peace.

We believe that, as Ministers, we should serve in bringing comfort to those who will be needing comfort, encouragement to those who will be needing courage, inspiration to All to choose the better way in general, to keep our Christian morale high and to maintain our vital life with God.³⁶

Such a mission statement was likely inspired in part by such matters as post-Depression politics and the imminent danger of the Nazi and Fascist regimes in the world. Christian churches during this era grew increasingly centered toward mission work and other forms of international aid. Grinnell’s United Presbyterian Church was no exception to this trend.

“How Can they Be Rounded for Christ?”

Both the Women’s Missionary Society (WMS) and the Round the World Circle (RWC) groups started meeting in the early 1940s. One record in the WMS 1944 minutes confirms the mission trend:

³⁵ Session Records, October 31, 1932

³⁶ Session Records, April 6, 1942

The Bible command is: if we want a Christian nation we are to train and teach our children for one and choose the right leaders – Train our children for Christ today will save the world for tomorrow....A great many of our young people that are in war work today report the world is getting more missionary minded than it was.³⁷

While the WMS focused on international charity, education, and evangelism, the RWC women (who were the younger generation of church women) formed to arrange similar aid for the nation and, specifically, Grinnell. Additionally, when the pastor was absent, the RWC and the WMS often took charge of the services.

The women enjoyed the social aspects of their organizations, striving to encourage fellowship at the same time as working to educate themselves about other people in the country and the world. Several women had talents that added more character to their groups. For example, WMS member Mrs. McComb composed songs such as “Be Still and Know that I am God.” Both groups had interesting ways of responding to roll call. Although the WMS primarily responded to roll with scripture verses beginning with an assigned letter of the alphabet, the RWC occasionally requested responses involving current events, famous actors, favorite recipes, favorite vacation places, or types of flowers. According to the minutes of both groups, refreshments were always “enjoyed by all.”

Although fellowship was an enjoyable aspect of the meetings, the women were all very socially concerned and active. At one 1943 WMS meeting, the secretary commented upon guest speaker Mrs Nichols’ education program for the day: “she too, impressed upon our minds: Had we sent our dollars to the Mission fields, we would not now be sending our boys and bullets....All were impressed by her sincerity.”³⁸ Mrs. Emily Hamilton was the WMS Temperance Secretary for many years. Active in local and national temperance efforts, she often gave reports to the group. One time, she “gave some thoughts on liquor business in our own Country,” which seemed an “eye-opener” to the group.³⁹ Another time, she “dwelt largely on Our Church’s Part in the making of a nation.” The secretary continued her commentary, saying, “how fitting to renew some of that strict observance of our forefathers, In this day when Society seems to have almost forgotten God.”⁴⁰ Often appearing on their

³⁷ WMS Minutes, June 14, 1944

³⁸ WMS Minutes, May 1943

³⁹ WMS Minutes, August 9, 1944

⁴⁰ WMS Minutes, September 1943

prayer lists, the WMS felt strongly about American Indian and African-American conditions. The group often prayed for the “Evangelism of the Negro, and often hoped for “a more humane [recognition] of the colored people.”⁴¹ Mrs. Cox once gave a program on American Indians and shared her thoughts on “how the Indian is being used by our Nation in Army duty – what light can the Church give them, as they put it – to help them know the white man’s God. How can they be rounded for Christ.”⁴²

Kate Hill met often with both groups to discuss her work in Kentucky and Africa. At one 1944 WMS meeting, she reported that “clothing sent [to Frenchburg, KY was] very helpful the sale of which helps defray [expenses] of students colored and white people working together.”⁴³ In autumn of 1945, she and Emily Hamilton presented several programs in focusing on Africa. Hill spoke of Africa’s “lack of education and civilization” but added that “it is a promising nation.”⁴⁴ Concluding Hamilton’s “reading...on white Man’s evils in Africa,” the group agreed that “the race problem is sure a real problem in Africa, too, as well as in the United States.”⁴⁵

The year 1945 seemed to bring the RWC much occasion to laugh and be lighthearted despite the world’s recent traumatic events. In April, “the program was centered around Schooldays so everyone was in costume,” and the meeting concluded with “a spelling and arithmetic quiz.”⁴⁶ During that meeting, the group decided to have a “galloping breakfast sometime in May.” Doris Breiting explained that the “galloping breakfast” was a popular progressive breakfast served quite often in members’ homes. The nickname for this meal was bestowed in honor of an early Sabbath School teacher who “rode her horse to church every Sunday, winter and summer, rain and sun.” Breiting added that groups moving from one home to the next would often drop by someone’s house even while that person was still getting dressed to drag them to the next course in the breakfast. The RWC used the \$50 raised by this 1945 breakfast to redecorate some area of the church.

The WMS received an unexpected visit in December 1945. Although the minutes report the visitor’s arrival in a serious and proper tone, it is easy to imagine the group sharing

⁴¹ WMS Minutes, November 10, 1943 and February 9, 1944

⁴² WMS Minutes, November 7, 1944

⁴³ WMS Minutes, July 12, 1944

⁴⁴ WMS Minutes, October 10, 1945

⁴⁵ WMS Minutes, July 12, 1944

⁴⁶ RWC Minutes, April 30, 1945

a few suppressed smiles and chuckles. While discussing finances, a knock came at the door around 8:00 P.M. at Mrs. Gregson's home. The secretary wrote: "Mr. Kelley, a representative of the 'Foster Product Co.,' came into our meeting at this time and interrupted the business. His business was to try and get our society to sell his products on a good profit. No action was taken at this meeting."⁴⁷

The church women were the main coordinators of social events, and, of course, food was of primary concern. During the 1940s, not only was a church dinner as good an excuse to gather as it always seems to be, it was often a means of making sure everyone could still get a decent meal in spite of rations. Pooling their resources, the women could sometimes get additional rations from the local officials because of the religious gathering, and some women already had privileges if their husbands were in the military. Such were the cases in 1946, when the RWC decided to "apply for sugar from the rationing board to use at our church entertainment."⁴⁸ Their efforts were certainly appreciated by the well-fed congregation.

Emily Hamilton continued to be a strong figure in the WMS. She regularly reported on her findings and efforts in the community and the nation. As the secretary in 1946 wrote, "Mrs Emily Hamilton read an article on Temperance. How grain was being used for the distilling of [Intoxicating] Beverage while Thousand[s] of Children starve. This created a discussion on local conditions especially the youths [and] maidens of our community who disregard the laws of God and Man."⁴⁹ A few months later, "Mrs. Emily Hamilton....gave some statistical reports, that are alarming. But We Americans fail to see the hand writing on the wall."⁵⁰ Their discussion was of a topic that would continue to trouble Grinnellians and to appear in many town groups' minutes, such as the Concerned Citizens, the Women's Temperance Society, and the Ministerial Alliance from the 1940s through the early 1970s. Occasionally, debate about the Varsity News Stand entered into discussion on alcohol and substance abuse. Townspeople and local churches repeatedly accused the business of selling pornographic materials and encouraging wild behavior among the local youths.

Funding for local missions became second to other concerns, however, when, on September 11, 1946,

⁴⁷ WMS Minutes, December 12, 1945

⁴⁸ RWC Minutes, June 21, 1946

⁴⁹ WMS Minutes, June 12, 1946

⁵⁰ WMS Minutes, September 11, 1946

The Treasurer Mrs. McIlrath reported no payments had been made on our Missionary's salary, which is seventy dollars. Mrs. McConaghie suggested she favored canceling some of our home obligations – and thereby pay the Missionary Salary – where upon the women of the society immediately pledged fifteen dollars. This verifies the fact that true Christian Spirit can accomplish a task well done.⁵¹

The missionary of whom they were speaking might have been Kate Hill, although it is possible that they were speaking of another sponsored missionary.

In December 1946, “the W-M-S...entertained the Round the World Circle.” Both groups seemed to enjoy the interaction, and the WMS secretary wrote that “it was an inspiration for the older women to have these younger women as guests. Hope we may do this more often in the future.”⁵² Over the years, the WMS had done educational mission work in Frenchburg and Ezel, Kentucky as well as Negro missions in Camden, Alabama and Indian missions in Oklahoma and Tama, Iowa.

Both women's mission groups frequently donated time, money, and new supplies to the church. In 1947, the RWC bought four dozen sets of knives, forks, and spoons for \$46.31, and in that same year bought a stove for the church basement. Once, “Mr. Stewart stopped in to thank the circle for preparing the supper...[and] asked the girls to clean the church.”⁵³ The next year they helped paint the church, and then sold baked goods at Hatcher's Garage to buy four new 36” x 96” tables for the church basement. One constant source of income for this group was the selling of vanilla. They often bought several cases at a time, and then sold them to church members and to other townspeople.

For a few years, the RWC enjoyed selecting “mystery sisters.” The members would draw each others' names and buy inexpensive gifts for their “sisters” throughout the year until December, when they would reveal their names to each other. They also threw Halloween parties in the church basement. Additionally, they gave dust puffs to members who had done outstanding service to the group for the year. In 1948, Hazel Frazier, Dorothy Peak, and Margaret Phillips all received dust puffs from the group.

The church, as always, needed ongoing small repairs. Stewart asked that the church be painted outside and that the parsonage be painted inside. The congregation talked about

⁵¹ WMS Minutes, September 11, 1946

⁵² WMS Minutes, December 1946

⁵³ RWC Minutes, November 1947

getting a new heating system, and the Sabbath School gave a white gift offering, which was most likely an offering of white linens and cloths. Stewart voiced some concerns about Sabbath School, saying its attendance “needed to be better and the church need[ed] to be more of a praying church, done by each individual of the church.”⁵⁴

The RWC again took on an active role in its mission to the church, serving over eight luncheons in little more than a year to raise money for church repairs. The women bought paint for the basement, paid for a Sunday School piano and 50 chairs, cleaned the church, sold the old piano for \$3.00, and coerced their male family members to clean the coal room. In 1953, they formed a committee to install a telephone in the church basement. Later that year, they paid \$1.25 for installation and \$1.62 per month for service. When Bobby Rose, a boy from Kentucky, wrote to the church to ask for clothes, the group expanded their mission to his family, establishing correspondence with him for at least two years.

Transitions

In 1953, the church received Stewart’s resignation. In their new search, the congregation “decided to give the pastor \$3600; \$2000 from the Ewart congregation (which helped the search) and \$1600 from Grinnell if we would find the right man.”⁵⁵ It was a short while before the Rev. Porter French of Ewart sent the Rev. Ernest E. Beattie to Grinnell. When a vote was taken for his installation, 20 of 22 people voted in approval. On December 13, 1953, at 3:30 P.M., Beattie was installed with his wife Blanche and son William at his side.

The RWC put \$100 toward repair work on the Manse and later gave \$100 for the pastor’s salary. They also gave \$50 to the church for a new water heater in the basement and made a white gift offering. Beattie asked the RWC to sponsor a junior choir, and one of their members agreed to try. In 1955, the women saved their Gold Medal Flour coupons from home and later bought a cake server for the church. They also bought a new sink for the restroom. In 1956, they helped the Grinnell United Council of Women transport two refugees to Grinnell.

⁵⁴ Congregational Meeting, 1950

⁵⁵ Congregational Meeting, September 15, 1953

By that same time, the pastor's salary had increased to \$1700. The RWC purchased the church's first two electric vacuum cleaners for \$60.98 in March of 1957. They also discussed setting up a church nursery during Sunday morning services. During one of their meetings, Mrs. John Burma "gave a very interesting talk on good grooming, poise, personality, and all the fine points about the 'Iowa Woman' which was the theme for the month of January."⁵⁶

Hardship fell upon the Beattie family when Blanche died on May 9, 1957 and Beattie dislocated his shoulder four months later. Although the RWC had previously "Discussed Rev. Beattie's housekeeping, meals & etc." and had "decided to let him handle his personal life independently of the church,"⁵⁷ they and many other members of the church helped him at home and in the church until he sufficiently recovered.

When he did recover, Beattie "called for suggestions of building up the choir. Mr. Holley presented a plan for buying an organ."⁵⁸ One year later a committee suggested a specific organ for \$280.80, and there was "much discussion" before the decision was unanimously accepted. Shortly after this time, Beattie informed the church that he intended to resign.

In June 1958, the Missions Board requested that Grinnell raise the pastor's salary if the church wanted a settled, full-time pastor. It was suggested that if the salary were raised to \$4800 including use of the manse, the church should try to get 75 of its families to pay \$55 each. In October, Beattie resigned while volunteering to stay for a while until the church was more settled. Merrill Miller offered his services for pulpit supply while the church searched for a new pastor.

In 1958, the RWC decided not to order any more vanilla to sell, but rather 144lbs of butter mint candy. They then bought new chairs (from Colfax, Iowa) and dividers for Sunday School. In the RWC's last entry, they recorded an interesting business transaction. They recorded the payment of \$5.24 to "Leeper(s) Music Co."⁵⁹ for tubas. Because it was December, they might have been renting them for church music, but no record explains this curious expense. They decided to disband their group in order to establish a new and larger

⁵⁶ RWC Minutes, January 1957

⁵⁷ RWC Minutes, May 1957

⁵⁸ Congregational Meeting, December 5, 1957

⁵⁹ RWC Minutes, December 12, 1958

women's church organization. The RWC and the WMS joined together, forming the Grinnell UPW (United Presbyterian Women).

By July 23, 1959 Edward Donald Byrd was acting as student pastor while the Rev. David Beggs (Mayflower) and the Rev. Galt conducted the Ordinances. Once he had finished seminary, the church formally called Byrd to be a settled pastor, and he was installed October 27, 1960. He was offered a salary of \$4800, with the National Board of Missions paying half the amount and the church covering the rest.

The UPW collected 90lbs of clothing to be sent to the Council of Church Women and later distributed in Kentucky or Alabama. In addition, the Mariners were chartered on January 19, 1961 as a new church group. Formed by and for church couples, one of their most popular events was a spaghetti dinner.

Disruption

On March 28, 1961, Session met to discuss a disturbing matter within the church. The minutes read:

The matter of recent gossip concerning the pastor's counseling activities was discussed. A complete report is to be made to the Presbytery's Ministerial Relations committee through Rev. Lowell McConnell, sub committee chairman. A vote of confidence in the pastor, was passed by unanimous vote of the session.⁶⁰

What the church had hoped was mere gossip had turned out to be uncomfortable truth. A professor at Grinnell College, who was a member of the church for one year, had been having marital difficulties with his wife. Donald Byrd, in his role as the church pastor, counseled her, but continued past the bounds of a counselor and engaged in an extramarital affair with her. Both the Byrds and the couple divorced while they were still involved in the church. Donald Byrd and his former consultee married and left the church, and Byrd can no longer be traced through Presbytery records.

There are a few positive memories of the man who left the church in scandal. Byrd owed money to several people when he left town in April of 1961, but eventually repaid all his debts. He is also remembered as a man who had an uncanny gift of communication with

⁶⁰ Session Minutes, March 28, 1961

young and sometimes restless teenagers. Some can recall his help in orienting the congregation toward a more progressive and socially contemporary direction.

Although Byrd's character or actions may be condemned, the congregation's integrity cannot be criticized. The members found their strength in each other to move beyond and learn from that painful period.

Session asked Beggs to fill the pulpit until another, more stable pastor could be found. The Presbytery soon sent Charles Landis for review, and on October 8, 1961, he was installed.

Gold Bond Stamps and Pinky Puppets

The congregation set aside \$300 from the Iowa Board of National Missions and Church Extension to be used exclusively for work with Grinnell College students, and the church united with other county Presbyterian churches to broadcast a five-minute advertising message on the radio. In 1962, the church also considered asking for \$10,000 to do repairs. There was discussion about turning the manse into Sunday School classrooms and an office while looking for a new manse. Two years later, the church sent three appraisals of the manse to the college for possible purchase. The Grinnell College students enjoyed a two-day retreat with ten college faculty. The UP women once again worked together to provide for the church. One meeting notes, "it was moved and seconded that we purchase crystal candlesticks for the church with gold bond stamps."⁶¹ Later that year, "We were asked to still save stamps but not the purple 4 [cent] or the grey 5 [cent] stamp."⁶² Those stamps eventually "provided 1,100,000 cups of milk for the foreign needy children."⁶³

In early 1965, Landis submitted his resignation to accept a job at the Presbyterian Center of the State College of Iowa Campus of Cedar Falls, Iowa. Before he left, he "advised that the hot water heater at the Manse [was] shot and that the Session had voted before to put in a new hot water heater but no action had been taken yet." The heater was replaced the next month.

Nearly six months later, the Rev. Ronald Rain and his wife Betty Jo came to Grinnell. Rain was installed as pastor with a salary of \$5,800. The UPW minutes note, "it was

⁶¹ UPW Minutes, May 1964

⁶² UPW Minutes, November 4, 1964

announced [that] the church would hold a ‘Grocery shower’ for our new minister [and] bride Wed. Sept. 8 at the church for all the members to attend. Each member was to bring either [canned fruit and vegetables or] cookies to be used later in the evening for refreshments.”⁶⁴

Rain was generally liked and supported by the church and the community. Through his connection with the Grinnell Ministerial Alliance, Rain participated in a 1966 cooperative minister exchange between the Congregational, Episcopal, Methodist, and United Presbyterian churches in town.

Ken Meek and Bill Logan were two of the more prominent members who provided labor in building and grounds work. Two \$7.50 signs were posted on Highway 6 advertising the church, and a \$19.95 gas lantern was later installed in the manse’s front yard. Session decided to raise \$5000 toward the purchase of a new manse, and in August, the church purchased its first typewriter. Session also discussed the “connection with Grinnell College Presbyterian youth. “There is a possibility of paid student help to assist the minister. Funds are available for such a ‘beachhead on the campus’ if this seems feasible.”⁶⁵

The Christmas tradition of the “Hanging of the Greens” seems to have begun in or around 1966. Church membership numbered 158, and seemed to be recovering smoothly from its early 1960s turmoil. Shortly following Zelma Zetmier’s passing in 1966, the UPW noted that “the Zetmiers gave the church their Pewter Communion Service.”⁶⁶ The group knitted and sewed sweaters and baby gowns to send to Korea. They were also asked to knit booties or make “Pinky Puppets” for the Community Hospital. Two years later they donated twenty-one pairs of hand-sewn washcloth slippers and handmade stuffed animals to the local hospital.

Let It be Corrected

Eight years after Hawaii and Alaska had joined the United States, a new 50 star flag was purchased for the church. Rain also distributed a booklet that he and Linda Mullins had written about the church’s history. Dr. Robert Baumann asked that the Session “express

⁶³ UPW Minutes, September 1, 1965

⁶⁴ UPW Minutes, September 1, 1965

⁶⁵ Session Minutes, October 11, 1966

⁶⁶ UPW Minutes, April 6, 1966

[their] thanks to Miss Mullins and Ron Rain for their work in preparing the booklet about the history of the church and that if the last statement in the booklet is incorrect that it be corrected.”⁶⁷

There was some discussion about altering a work counter in the kitchen to make it more suitable for a classroom. Bill Logan was recruited to fix the leaking hot water heater in the church and to repair the leaking kitchen roof in the manse. Presbytery approved a new rule that would guarantee pastors two weeks each year for study. A speaker system was installed in the sanctuary.

In April 1968, Session discussed a “Negro exchange.” Harry and Arlene Mill asked the church to find out “how many couples in our church would be willing to invite a Negro couple from Des Moines to come to Grinnell to spend a Sunday with us in Worship and the rest of the day with the couple who invited them.”⁶⁸ The couple would be given a return invitation from the exchange couple in Des Moines. Two months later, Rain reported on the results of Mill’s poll: “5 families responded as desiring to host a Negro family, 1 responded as not desiring to host a Negro family, 2 responded as favorable but could not host a Negro family.”⁶⁹ Session voted not to take action on the Worship and Home with Negro Families proposal at the time.

When the manse roof began to leak again and its bathroom floor needed repair, Norman Hockett repaired the damage. Harry Mill donated paint to cover the sanctuary, and Jean King donated some trees for the landscape plan. Arrangements were made for Grinnell College students to share Thanksgiving dinner with Session members. In the 1968 annual Pastor’s Report, Rain mentioned that he “attended a meeting at the Catholic Church concerning the juvenile problem in Grinnell.”⁷⁰ The Princeton Seminary choir gave a concert at the church.

The UPW was active as ever and tried to orient their programs toward current issues. In April 1969, a guest spoke on the “Dimensions of Sexuality,” and “members were reminded to circulate the reading books and the portfolios on Black History and American Indians.”⁷¹ In June, “it was moved and seconded for Shirley [Egli] to purchase a Dutch oven, which is to

⁶⁷ Session Minutes, July 11, 1967

⁶⁸ Session Minutes, April 9, 1968

⁶⁹ Session Minutes, July 9, 1968

⁷⁰ Session Minutes, November 9, 1968

be given to the Tama Mesquakie Mission Church.”⁷² The UP women planned to pay for the oven by cashing in Betty Crocker coupons. Four months later, the Rev. LaVern Seth and Chief George Young Bear of the Tama Mission Church came to Grinnell to show slides during a family “dessert pot-luck.” With their Betty Crocker coupons, the UPW also helped fund a bus for the Woodward State Hospital. In 1970, the group held a series of meetings with a theme of hunger. They started to work with UNICEF around this time, and at one meeting, their “usual ‘calorie-loaded’ lunch was replaced with crackers, tea [and] coffee so [they] all could perhaps feel a ‘twinge of hunger.’”⁷³

In 1969, there was another attempt to discuss and arrange the sale of the manse, and Session finally decided to purchase the home of Wayne Gaedelmann, at 1523 Elm, for \$17,500. In September, Rain terminated his position with the church to continue his studies at Eden Theological Seminary. The old manse was rented out for \$125 a month. Shortly after, the Rev. Clifford Croxford was installed on June 21, 1970 on a salary of \$7200 which was later raised \$600. The church purchased storm and screen windows and a garbage disposal for the manse. The manse’s ceiling was also repaired for \$45. The Croxfords also decided to paint the manse and did the work themselves.

A Controversial Lease

The Session made another big decision in 1969. The church was leased to a Day Care Center for \$125 per month for a three-month trial period. After three months, the church decided to keep the lease agreement for six more months but drop the charge to \$50 per month. Although the lease was bringing the church extra money, some members of the congregation felt that the regular outside use of the space was inappropriate and hazardous for the building’s physical condition. This debate about the business’s presence would continue throughout its rental life.

The Day Care Center installed a fence in the north lot to form a play area for the children. When the old gas stove in the church went out of commission, the Day Care installed a new one. Then, in September, they installed their own phone. Montie Redenius,

⁷¹ UPW Minutes, April 9, 1969

⁷² UPW Minutes, June 5, 1969

Clerk of Session at the time, wrote: “As usual the mention of “Day Care Center” raised the temperature of the meeting and after many minutes of rambling debate about the dish washers, sinks, deep freezers, frozen pipes, screen door, the need of Day Care Center, poor people, etc., the session members decided not to decide.”⁷⁴ The Session did, however, agree to raise the Day Care Center’s rent to \$60 per month. One year later, the Day Care Center no longer met fire and safety codes, so it terminated the lease and eventually moved to its present location, in the Ahrens Center.

Building and Grounds chair John Annin reported that “they [were] working on getting a lock on the front door of the church. They [were] also working on getting the pigeons removed from the front porch.”⁷⁵ Apparently the church had some problems with more than the pigeons, because “the tenants of the old manse [had] been given 30 day notice to leave.”⁷⁶ Don Lambie wanted to make solicitations for funds to build a two-car garage at the new manse for an estimated cost of \$900. While Croxford studied at a pastor’s school, Grinnell College Prof. Howard Burkle filled the pulpit.

On July 6, 1972, Clifford Croxford died of cancer. While the church grieved and rebounded to look for a new pastor, the Rev. Dick Menzel took over as moderator, and with the Session he proposed the new pastor’s salary to be between \$8,000 and \$10,000 including use of the manse. In November of that same year, Daniel Ogata with his wife Yuri and his daughter Lynn visited from Edina, Minnesota. Ogata’s introduction was well received, and he was installed on February 11, 1973. In his first five months, Ogata received 25 new members into the church.

At a May Session meeting, Ogata “read a letter he had received from Mrs. Woodburn the wife of the first minister of our church. She is now 98 years old.”⁷⁷ She described the memories she had of the church and wished the congregation well from her convalescent home in Pennsylvania. Session decided to give \$20 to the Grinnell Fire and Police Departments each year. There was discussion of building a new wing onto the church, tiling the basement ceiling and carpeting the floor. An anonymous member donated \$10,000 to the church for a future building fund, and two members gave gifts of \$500 and \$2,500. Hearing

⁷³ UPW Minutes, September 9, 1970

⁷⁴ Session Records, September 1970

⁷⁵ Session Records, May 11, 1971

⁷⁶ Session Records, May 11, 1971

aids were installed in the sanctuary that year. Session also reported that “an Electrolux sweeper was given to the church,” and “the light from the Church bulletin board bothers Mrs. Wilson.”⁷⁸ A bulb on the outdoor marquee was apparently flickering and disturbing a neighbor.

In March of 1974, Francis Anderson suggested that the Episcopal children be invited to join the church’s Sunday School classes until another Episcopal priest was found. In January 1975 the Presbyterian church again sought to assist the Episcopal church, this time after their church was damaged by a weekend fire. The First United Presbyterian youth organized a fundraiser to donate money to their repairs.

Ogata participated in a “Chaplain for a day” program at the Hospital in a rotational system with other area ministers. The 1970s Session enjoyed the social aspect of their meetings, remembers Montie Redenius. “Those were the good Session times because after Session we’d go down to the Longhorn [restaurant and bar] and have a beer or two to unwind.” The 1905 congregation would most certainly *not* have approved of such behavior from the Session. The 1905 *Gospel Messenger* includes a Temperance Lesson:

Golden Text: - “At the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder.”
Prov. 23:32

Was ever the course of sin more vividly portrayed than here?

Woe – sorrow – contention – babblings – wounds without cause – redness of eyes – the serpent’s bite – the adder’s sting – delirium!

And then DEATH?

Yes, death in its awful sense; not annihilation, not oblivion, but the death of an unquenchable desire, the death where “the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched,” the DEATH OF ETERNAL SEPARATION FROM GOD!

And our fellowmen are going there, - going by the hundred thousand! Is it not time to come to the rescue? “Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?”

How long will the church slumber! How long will the Christian voter go to the ballot-box and open still wider the gates of Hell!

“The Saloon cannot be licensed without SIN.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Session Minutes, May 1, 1973

⁷⁸ Session Minutes, May 1973

Exodus and Entry

On September 11, 1975, “a letter from the Synod of Lakes and Prairies releasing the \$10,000 mortgage on the Church was read by the Secretary.”⁸⁰ Bolstered by this encouraging historical marker, a committee approached Grinnell College to buy the lot just north of the church for \$6,000. The committee organized a fundraising campaign for three-year pledges to raise \$100,000 or more prior to negotiating building contracts.

The new church was designed to be handicapped-accessible, with space for a full wing addition if time would deem it necessary. The original plans showed a reverse placement of the current layout, with the sanctuary to the west of the classrooms, but because of the curve in Sixth Avenue, it was decided that there would be more physical flexibility with the current configuration. Two years later, a new church was built just behind the old, and an “Exodus and Entry” service was planned for Easter Sunday, April 10, 1977.

After a Prayer of Thanksgiving and a Litany of Expectancy, the Acolytes and the Elders moved into an “honor guard” position, and a trumpet fanfare with the organ played “Faith of Our Fathers.” The congregation wound their way from the old sanctuary, out the door, behind the church, through the door and into the new sanctuary. When everyone had reached the new sanctuary, the last stanza of the hymn was sung. There were several ceremonial gestures involving the Bible, the offering plates, the candles, and the flags. Bob Baumann, then the President of the Congregation, read Congratulatory Messages, and then the rest of the Easter service was completed.

Dedication Sunday followed on May 15, 1977, with a special service following the regular service at 3:00 P.M. Darlene and Jerry Switzer sang “Bless This House” and the choir sang a few selections as well. Fittingly, the first wedding performed in the new church was that of two members, Peggy Heishman and Randy German. Only a few months later, the church celebrated its 75th anniversary.

⁷⁹ *The Gospel Messenger*, March 25, 1905

⁸⁰ Session Minutes, September 11, 1975

Windows

John Peak was given the authority to dispose of the old manse as soon as possible. By December 8, 1976, \$135,000 had already been paid on the new church. When Darlene Switzer resigned from the position of choir director, Barbara Lien was hired for \$500 a month. When Anna Holley handed in her resignation from her position as organist, Session did not accept the resignation and asked that she retire later. When she did finally retire in September 1977 after many years of service, she was duly honored.

The old manse was finally torn down in April 1977, and the new estimated building cost reached \$267,412.58. Session held its first meeting in the new church on May 3, 1977. The old pulpit furniture was sold for \$500 to a church furniture salesman in October 1979. Session voted to give itself authority to handle decisions about the stained-glass windows from the old church. Six Session members wanted to keep the glass, and three voted to get rid of it. As majority won the vote, Robert Schellenburg was contracted to design and reinstall the old stained glass into the new church. Marilyn Annin and Julie Ahrens worked with him to develop sketches to illustrate possibilities for using the glass in new ways. The windows were separated and distributed to form the circle in the current sanctuary cross and to border the main door into the church. Much of the glass is also displayed on the church entry ceiling.

Ogata reported the need for a new stove in the manse, and one was purchased for \$400. Session minutes in May 1979 read, “Julie Baumann is to work with acolytes to prevent their running around with the candle lighters.”⁸¹ The church purchased 50 new hymnals, asking for \$5 donation for each copy. Session reported having trouble getting Schellenburg to finish his work. When Schellenburg eventually finished his job on April 7, 1981, Gene Breiting touched the work up and repaired the stained-glass windows in the entry. Breiting was also later contracted to install the other stained glass windows. In May 1981, a \$20,000 gift was received for the Building Fund. Breiting also planted bushes on the north side of the church which are still there and thriving.

Redenius asked that the Deacons be given authority to sponsor a Cambodian family and Session agreed. The Sovath family later came under the Deacons’ further care when their

⁸¹ Session Minutes, May 1, 1979

federal funds were cut off. Mr. Siv Sovath was soon hired as sexton when Isabelle Rutherford resigned, and Evelyn Creps began to teach English to Lor Sovath.

First Presbyterian Church

On January 8, 1980, the congregation mourned the passing of Yuri Ogata. She was “remembered fondly by members of the church for bringing casseroles to the sick, providing gracious ‘people touches,’ and teaching origami to decorate the church Christmas tree with white peace cranes.”⁸² No longer feeling a need for the manse, Ogata requested a housing allowance and moved to his new condominium home at Park Place. The manse was sold for \$43,000.

Session voted to approve PCUS and PCUSA union and also voted to “go on record” as being in favor of nuclear freeze. An appreciation award was given to Redenius, who served for 18 years as Clerk of Session. Around this time, Ogata advised that the church was now required to drop “United” from its name, due to the national union. The new name of the church would be First Presbyterian Church. He also “reported that the church choir will be singing a selection from *Chariots of Fire* at the worship service on May 20, 1984.”⁸³

In August, the church bought a copy machine and decided to sell its mimeograph and stencil cutter for the best offer. The Episcopal church asked if they could use the copier in 1985 to copy about 25,000 pages. Two months later, the Episcopalians were thinking of buying their own copier. The Presbyterian church received \$4000 from Ruth Campbell’s estate. A memorial gift from Lillian Duffus provided the church with \$500 to purchase a baptismal font. The church ordered a font with antique gold leaf carving on one side from the Gunder Manufacturing Company of Humboldt, Iowa to match the communion table and pulpit. When the baptismal font arrived that September, however, it was found to be unsatisfactory, and it was sent back for another.

Ogata arranged his retirement plans, and scheduled dissolution of pastoral relationship for August 15, 1985. He remains active in the Grinnell community, organizing such loved events as the Farmer’s Market and the Annual Kite Festival, and he occasionally returns to

⁸² Elizabeth Howell Verdesi and Sylvia Thorson-Smith, *A Sampler of Saints* (Committee on Women’s Concerns and the Council on Women and the United Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1988), 36.

First Presbyterian Church to fill the pulpit. Ogata's name would continue to steer the congregation's energy for at least another year, however. In April, Baumann challenged the church to honor Ogata by burning the mortgage. A few months later, the Synod of Lakes and Prairies congratulated the congregation on its independence. A special "burning of the mortgage" ceremony and a retirement celebration were later held together on August 11, 1985, with Ogata officiating and Don Lambie and Francis Anderson assisting. At last the church could officially call themselves independent and Ogata could retire knowing he had taken the church to a significant new level in its life.

New Music

In January of 1986, Session notes a remarkable finding: "It was reported that the church might be the owner of a small cemetery in Jasper County with approximately five to seven graves. Further investigation was to be conducted."⁸⁴ Dan Kaiser suggested to Session that they pay \$100 to Criminal Justice Ministries. In that year, a Crisis Center was organized by the Grinnell Ministerial Association and MICA. The Presbyterian church agreed to provide one volunteer board member and two regular volunteers. Ogata found happiness with a new partner, and he asked the church for use of its sanctuary in his second marriage. He sent a blank check to the church in thanks, but it was promptly returned to him.

The Pastor Nominating Council presented the Rev. Michael Davis Smith, an Associate Pastor from an 800-member church in Tucson, for a salary of \$20,000. The church accepted the candidate and installed him on December 7, 1986.

Gene & Doris Breiting's daughter planted a tree according to the Master Landscape Plan for their 50th wedding anniversary in November 1986. Dan Kaiser mentioned his interest in establishing a USSR sister city, and gave a sermon on this idea in March. Redenius added that as a member of the City Council, he knew Iowa Governor Terry to be working on forming a sister state relationship.

In 1988, the church received an anonymous \$1000 gift for a new outdoor sign. Presbytery re-affirmed an inclusive language policy, and affirmed a pro-choice stance. The

⁸³ Session Minutes, April 10, 1984

⁸⁴ Session Minutes, January 19, 1986

Presbyterian youth group planned a Rock-a-Thon, lock-in and ski trip for 1990. Shane Cook coordinated the purchase of 136 new hymnals at \$11.95 each, to be paid for by donations and memorials with the added incentive of a personal copy of the old hymnal in exchange for the donation of a new one. She also ordered 25 Bibles. Randy German headed a volunteer labor group that installed a sidewalk along the State Street side of the property. Two sand cherry bushes were given to Smith in honor of the 25th anniversary of his Ordination and fifth year as pastor in Grinnell.

In September 1991, Session voted to leave out the “Amen” at the end of the Doxology, consistent with the new hymnal. The church also planned its fourth Jazz Sunday, the first having been established in October 1988. In December, Vivaldi’s Gloria was performed. The Organ Committee recommended the purchase of a new \$25,000-30,000 electric organ with the help of a large outside donation. April 10, 1994 was arranged to be Organ Dedication Sunday.

A House Divided *Can* Stand

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), deep divisions have existed since a 1978 ruling that homosexual behavior is sinful and that self-affirming, practicing homosexuals are not qualified to hold the church offices of ordained elder, deacon, or minister of word and sacrament. In 1997 the policy was expanded to disqualify anyone who was sexually active outside a marriage between a man and a woman.

First Presbyterian Church in Grinnell is one congregation among many which has experienced significant conflict over sexuality issues and particularly over the status of gays and lesbians in the church. Before coming to Grinnell as pastor, Smith had long been an advocate for the full inclusion of lesbians and gays in all aspects of church life, including ordained office, and he continued that advocacy in Grinnell.

Smith’s wife, Sylvia Thorson-Smith, also a strong supporter of gay rights, was appointed to the committee established by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1988 to conduct a new major study of human sexuality with recommendations for the denomination. In the months prior to and following the presentation of the committee’s report to the General Assembly in June of 1991, the controversial study received widespread attention in the religious and secular national news media.⁸⁵

Prompted by Smith, a few church members and the Session organized several classes and discussions about conflict and about homosexuality. The discussions were intended to

⁸⁵ Michael D. Smith, *When Sex Comes to Church* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2001), 3-4.

allow for each individual involved in the church to voice private concerns or questions. In 1991, “the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour asked if they could come to Grinnell and videotape the discussions in the congregation as part of their coverage of the Presbyterian Church’s report on human sexuality.”⁸⁶ Although the Session approved the visit, all of the members “expressed concern for how the media’s presence might be viewed by the congregation, knowing several members would not like the public exposure.”⁸⁷ Interviews with adult church discussion groups, Thorson-Smith, individuals, and couples appeared on television on June 10, 1991, when General Assembly was scheduled to act on the human sexuality report. The newscast, apart from its national ramifications, served to further divide some members in the church. The majority of the congregation courageously dealt with the tension and turmoil in a constructive manner, however the issue was far from over.

In 1994, General Assembly and Presbytery sent a request that all congregations engage in study and dialogue on the issue of homosexuality. They requested a group of people differing in opinion gather regularly to discuss the issue and to share their ideas with the congregation. Alexander Moffett, Suzanne Redenius, Clark Lindgren, Emily Moore, and Shane Cook agreed to lead this project. Smith organized a study process through which the congregation would be able to express their differing views and concerns about the conflict. Once again, Smith attempted to balance the discussions between the issue of homosexuality and the process of understanding, respecting, and dealing with conflict as a healthy part of a church’s life.

The congregation soon had a chance to test their new methods of dealing with conflict. In November 1995,

a lesbian member of the congregation was nominated for the office of elder. From 1977 until her death in September 1998, Barbara Lien served the congregation as choir director and/or organist, filling both positions since Smith became pastor in 1986. Lien taught piano at Grinnell College and was known to be a lesbian by many friends and acquaintances on campus, and by fewer, though some, in the congregation.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Smith, *When Sex Comes to Church*, 13.

⁸⁷ Smith, *When Sex Comes to Church*, 13-14.

⁸⁸ Smith, *When Sex Comes to Church*, 25

If Session decided to proceed, Lien's ordination would violate denominational policy, but "the committee was aware of that fact and chose to nominate her anyway."⁸⁹ Lien was ordained February 4, 1996.

Although the church generally accepted and respected this decision, to some the act was the limit of their tolerance, and they left the church. Between 1991 and 1996, regular attendance dropped by 35 to 40 percent and "twenty members left the congregation primarily due to the conflict over issues of sexuality and disagreement with the pastor's views."⁹⁰ Their absence was felt personally, but also financially. Between 1991 and 1992, the church lost almost \$20,000 in pledges, and "the congregation began 1995 with a balance of only \$159, with the previous year's last quarter payment of \$1,100 for the pastor's pension and medical insurance left unpaid."⁹¹ Smith recognized that the time had come to put aside his pursuit of the issue until the church was stable enough to handle the topic again. There were positive results of this conflict, as well. Not only had the congregation survived a severe test of its solidarity, it had gained eleven members who "indicated to the pastor and others that the congregation's openness to the inclusion of lesbians and gays was an important factor in choosing to join First Presbyterian Church."⁹²

The process of discussing various points of view on the topic of homosexuality culminated in an annual congregation meeting during which Janet Carl facilitated small group discussion. A letter from Session that Carl had drafted was "sent to all members of the congregation regarding the Session's analysis and conclusions of the information gathered through [meetings in homes]."⁹³ She was warmly thanked for her work, noting "the positive effect the process [had] on the life of the congregation."⁹⁴

Honor and Peace

An ice cream social was held in Central Park on July 21, 1994 and a hayride and wiener roast followed in October. William Patch donated and planted two amur maple trees

⁸⁹ Smith, *When Sex Comes to Church*, 26.

⁹⁰ Smith, *When Sex Comes to Church*, 28.

⁹¹ Smith, *When Sex Comes to Church*, 31.

⁹² Smith, *When Sex Comes to Church*, 29.

⁹³ Congregational Meeting, January 19, 1997

⁹⁴ Congregational Meeting, January 19, 1997

on the south side of the office wing. He also led adult classes in study of the Nuremburg Trials and the Holocaust in May of 1995, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. That same month, “The Peace” was introduced to worship on a trial basis. The ritual of shaking hands and greeting neighbors in the “Peace of Christ” during the worship service caught on, and the practice continues to be a regular part of worship. In August, the congregation made paper cranes to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima.

The Session reaffirmed their commitment to independent, local shops and the small town way of life when Wal-Mart changed their hours to include Sunday mornings. In a letter dated September 19, 1996, Session wrote:

Dear Sir:

Wal-Mart, an important retail presence in our community, is an influential shopping destination in Grinnell. We are disturbed that your expanded hours now include Sunday morning.

Not only will these Sunday morning work hours curtail possible church attendance by Wal-Mart employees at their church of choice, but this change also sends a message to the whole Grinnell community that you do not support our traditional value of encouraging Sunday morning family and church activities. Surely Wal-Mart founder, the late Sam Walton, and his wife Helen would not have endorsed such a decision, and we ask for your reconsideration.

We are calling this matter to the attention of members and friends of the First Presbyterian Church, Grinnell.

Sincerely,
Members of the Session⁹⁵

First Aid

Carl proposed the formation of an ad hoc committee to assist 20-year-old Nancy Kpokai who came to the United States on Student Visa as a refugee from Liberia. She asked to establish a separate bank account in the church’s name to manage funds for the student. Kpokai arrived January 11, 1997 and lived with Carl and her family, taking classes at Marshalltown Community College. Timothy Phillips proposed a fundraiser for Kpokai; to sponsor senior high bowlers in a bowl-a-thon, putting the money toward whatever Nancy

needed most. The money eventually went toward Nancy's \$38 monthly health insurance payment. In May 1997, Kpokai joined First Presbyterian Church. Also in May, the church sent flowers to St Paul's Episcopal Church for the dedication of their new sanctuary. The church contributed \$100 to the Grinnell UCC pastor's recovery fund, following his bicycle accident.

On June 21, 1998, worship was again held at Arbor Lake. Because Smith was away, the service consisted of Alexander Moffett's poetry, interwoven with the hymns and scripture. Moffett was born in China and served as a Presbyterian medical missionary with his wife in China from 1935 to 1940. Smith has often quoted his poetry, and publications at the Mayflower Homes often feature his work.

In August, the congregation experimented with a new arrangement of the pews. Instead of having all the pews face one wall of the sanctuary, the front half of the rows were rotated so that they faced each other. The pastor's new position was to be in the open embracement of the new U-shaped form.

After having served the church as music director for 21 years, Barbara Lien took leave in August of 1998 for medical reasons and died of cancer on September 2, 1998. Her funeral was attended by 330 people. Session decided to purchase a memorial for her which now hangs above the choir loft in the sanctuary. On April 18, 1999, Grinnell College's Stonewall Library was dedicated in the memory and honor of Lien and her partner, B. G. Voertman.

Nancy Kpokai made plans to attend Stillman College in Alabama, but needed to find the \$10,000 tuition. Session decided to think about what the church could do for her. The church soon planned a benefit dinner with a silent auction and sold customized t-shirts to raise money for her tuition. The church youth performed a talent recital as a fundraiser for Kpokai. The benefit dinner brought in \$4,700. With \$200 from the Ruth Thorson memorial and a bit of money from a few other sources, Kpokai's fund soon reached \$5,728. The youth again pitched in their support and help and offered a potato bar to the congregation after one Sunday service. The money they received again went toward Kpokai's tuition. She graduated May 12, 2001 from Stillman College.

⁹⁵ Session Minutes, September 1996

A New Century

In 1999, Session received a complaint that the communion bread was too crumbly, and the situation was later remedied. In September of the following year, the congregation decided that eating together should be a permanent, dependable part of its social life and declared the third Sunday of each month to be a Potluck Sunday.

Kris Harms of Pella, Iowa became Music Director in October 2000. Session voted to accept Rebecca Parkins, a Dubuque Theological Seminary student, as an intern for the remainder of 2000 until June 2001. Regularly assisting Smith with the weekly services, she stayed until December 2001, when she moved to Tacoma, Washington with her family to take on her first ordained position.

In July 2001, the church became involved in RAGBRAI events. Session quickly reported that the “RAGBRAI fund raising dinner [which David Cranston had coordinated to serve over 600 people] was a great success and net proceeds totaled \$4,100, as food and supplies were graciously donated.” Several members of the church gathered to sponsor a pie table, and “our church received the third place award for best pie stand and the apple pie made by our volunteer committee led by Marlene Peak received the overall best pie award for all of RAGBRAI. Sylvia Thorson-Smith and Janet Carl were awarded the third and seventh best pies respectively.” The Des Moines Register presented the church with a RAGBRAI award glass pie plate. The craze over the pies did not end in August. Session “raised the possibility of capitalizing on the pie successes by offering the award winning pies at the meal following Jazz Sunday worship and/or a special pie and ice cream social early in the fall.”⁹⁶

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, “Session voted to split evenly the \$200 of local peacemaking funds between the Iowa Peace Institute and support for [a local Afghan refugee family].”⁹⁷ Several church members had been working with other townspeople and college students to sponsor an Afghan refugee family by offering them transportation, housing, entertainment, food, and English language lessons.

Session again faced a question about the communion bread. The minutes from February 2, 2002 read:

⁹⁶ Session Records, August 15, 2001

⁹⁷ Session Records, October 17, 2001

A discussion of the bread served for Communion was discussed. Concern had been raised about proper sanitation with people taking from the common loaf, and that it was difficult for some members to break off an appropriate amount for dipping into the cup. It was agreed to experiment with having pieces of bread already on the plate, as well as the option of breaking off a piece from the loaf.⁹⁸

The method of distribution was tried, and it has continued to work well with the congregation.

In the summer of 2002, the congregation approached its centennial anniversary. A series of five brunches were hosted each Sunday with a theme covering two decades for each meal. Posters, books, family heirlooms, clothes, music, and food all helped to model the many different periods through which the church had lived. The congregation also started to notice several renovation projects. A new sound system was installed to improve clarity and range. Brian Hoffman and Marta Miller worked together to repaint the church hallway, fellowship hall, and nursery. Hoffman also led a mission to remove the old floor tiling in preparation for new tiles in the hallways and the kitchen. In the Fellowship Hall, pew benches were reupholstered, and new curtains were hung. By August, the congregation had slightly exceeded its Centennial Capital Fund Drive goal of \$26,700. A night of music with an old-fashioned ice cream social commemorated the church's first gathering, and a grand celebration dinner was planned for the church's 100th anniversary of its charter, on September 15, 2002.

As the church completes its hundredth year, may it look back on its history with awe and pride. May its members ever continue the work of their forebears: to experience, develop, change, minister, persevere, trust, apply, challenge, and explore their faith according to God's direction.

⁹⁸ Session Records, February 20, 2002