Michigan Church Celebrates 125th Anniversary

In 125 years, Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., has transitioned from a church that served Dutch immigrants by incorporating the Dutch language into its services to a church that continues to serve its ethnically diverse neighborhood.

In May, Oakdale Park held three commemorative services celebrating the past, present, and future of the congregation. Committed to diversity, the church has overcome difficulties while growing into its own culturally diverse place of worship.

“The first Sunday was a reflection on the past that included the celebration and recognition of growth through embracing immigrants—most of whom were Dutch,” said Rev. John Rozeboom, the church’s administrator.

“The second service focused on current ministry diversity,” Rozeboom said. After Oakdale Park welcomed Dutch immigrants, the congregation experienced another cultural shift. “White flight”—the movement of Caucasian residents to the suburbs—changed the membership landscape. In the 1960s and 1970s, many African Americans migrated from the southern U.S. and moved into available homes. Oakdale Park welcomed these new members to their existing immigrant-based congregation. Diversity continues to play an important role in the church.

The commemorative services concluded with senior pastor Rev. Emmett Harrison focusing on the spiritual growth of Oakdale’s members. Rozeboom said that since its beginning in 1890, the church has reached out, now hosting over 500 members, with 300 of them participating in regular worship groups.

The future looks bright. “Kids are an important part of Oakdale’s ministry,” said Rozeboom. “One hundred kids attend the church, and there is about one baptism each month.”

—K. Schmitt

CRC Executive Director Issues Statement on Court Ruling re Same Sex Marriage

Steven Timmermans, executive director of the Christian Reformed Church, issued a statement in response to the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling that made same sex marriage legal across the nation.

Steven Timmermans, executive director of the Christian Reformed Church, issued a statement in response to the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling that made same sex marriage legal across the nation.

While many denominations and religious organizations are taking public stands against the ruling, Timmermans noted that the Christian Reformed Church already has a position on homosexuality and one on marriage. The CRC’s position on marriage states, “Marriage is an institution created by God. It is a covenant relationship established by mutual vows between a man and a woman united by God.” He also pointed out that both of those documents refer to the CRC’s synod-appointed study committee to provide pastoral advice concerning same sex marriage. The committee is scheduled to report in 2016.

Timmermans said that some of the questions coming to his office are from people wondering if the state can, by means of the recent Supreme Court ruling, force churches to open their doors to

Ontario Group Sews ‘Fidget Quilts’ for Veterans

Fidget (or touchy) quilts, used to reduce agitation for patients suffering from dementia, are also now being used by veterans, thanks to the Busy Hands group at Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Brockville, Ont. The group made and delivered 23 fidget quilts to Perley and Rideau Veteran’s Health Centre in Ottawa, Ont. The quilts are made of many different textured fabrics and have embellishments such as pockets, zippers, and lace, all of which enable patients to focus their hands and minds through sensory stimulation.

Perley and Rideau Veteran’s Health Centre, which serves over 250 veteran residents and 200 community residents, is one of the largest senior care centers in Ontario.

“The quilts are pretty easy to make. If you can sew a straight line, you can make one of these quilts,” said Maggie Sportel, a member of Busy Hands. The group held a fundraiser to purchase four more sewing machines and received donations of materials from congregation members and textile shops.

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt
same sex marriages. "The answer, while not at a level of legal advice, continues to be the same," he said. "If a church restricts the use of its building for its stated religious purposes, it can refuse to 'rent' to others for different purposes."

He concluded his statement saying that Christians must give clear witness to Jesus' command to love one another.

**Noteworthy**

The girls soccer team at Calvin Christian High School in Grandville, Mich., won its fourth consecutive state Division IV championship.

Following his win in Michigan, Anthony Langeland won first place in the Skills USA National Competition, making him the national champion in Diesel Technology.

Rev. Duane J. Timmermans, 57, described by many as having a magnetic personality, was a down-to-earth person who connected easily with anyone and everyone. He died unexpectedly on April 10 following a stroke suffered while driving a friend to the airport.

Timmermans graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1986. He served Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church in Berwyn, Ill., and Vogel Center CRC in McBain, Mich., where he was pastor at the time of his death. Throughout the years, Timmermans also worked on various synodical committees.

Timmermans was an ordinary man in many ways. He enjoyed the simple things in life, including fishing and gardening. Those who had conversations with Timmermans always knew he was a man of God. He loved being a pastor; ministry for him was a blessed and positive experience.

Timmermans is survived by his wife, Sharon, and their three children, and by his father and parents-in-law.

--- Janet A. Greidanus