

Three Congregations Celebrate 125 Years

“On Thursday afternoon, October 19, 1893, a meeting was held in Leighton, Iowa, to organize a new congregation,” reads an anniversary booklet printed last fall. That congregation, **Leighton Christian Reformed Church**, now shares its pastor with Tracy (Iowa) CRC and is still ministering in its community after more than 125 years.

“We are a very small congregation and are very grateful and fortunate that we have survived as a small church,” said vice president of the church council Bernie Hardeman.

The Leighton CRC commemorations last October included a celebration communion service and an evening community celebration with music and memories.

Peoria Christian Reformed Church members in Pella, Iowa, marked 125 years of ministry in June. Three former pastors of the church came to celebrate, reflecting on Peoria CRC’s journey and God’s faithfulness. Rev. George Den Oudsten, the church’s current pastor, led the evening service, and vocal groups made up of current members and those who had grown up in the church participated. A highlight was reciting the Ten Commandments in Dutch, the original language of the church. The practice was suspended in 1918 after the Iowa governor’s proclamation against non-English language use in public.

A 1950s-themed carhop dinner and drive-in movie, sermons by former pastors, and a river tubing trip are some of the anniversary events marked by members of **Prosper Christian Reformed Church** in Falmouth, Mich., this summer. The congregation still meets in its traditional, steepled sanctuary built in the early 1900s, but anniversary commemorations have included those outside the church walls.

“The last 15 to 20 years, our focus has been more outward (toward the community), than inward,” said member Steve Ebels, whose great-great-grandfather was a charter member and whose great-granddaughter was just baptized at Prosper CRC. “We have the best news in the world . . . we can’t just sit on it.”

—Banner correspondents

Youth Unlimited: ‘100 Years of Belonging to God’



Convention Photo Taken at the Sherman Street Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan (Photo by Feingold)

Youth Unlimited, an organization helping churches challenge young people to commit their lives to Jesus Christ and transform this world for him, is celebrating “100 Years of Belonging to God.”

Still based in Grand Rapids, Mich., and serving churches across North America, Youth Unlimited has changed in form and in name over its century-long history. In 1919, associations of young Christian men formed the American Federation of Reformed Young Men’s Societies. The early founders were young Dutch immigrants to North America who met in small groups for the study of Scripture and personal spiritual growth. After a merger with a Reformed Young Women’s Society and a few subsequent iterations, the organization became Youth Unlimited in 1993.

Several events in 2019 will commemorate the centennial, including a golf outing and two celebration dinners this fall in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Woodstock, Ont. The organization’s executive director Rick Zomer, gave a brief presentation to the Christian Reformed Church’s annual general assembly in June and presented a workshop at Inspire 2019, the CRC’s denomination-wide ministry-focused conference.

Youth Unlimited currently supports churches in their youth ministries by organizing and carrying out short-term missions known as SERVE trips. Other programs from Youth Unlimited’s history include Compass 21, a youth ministry assessment tool developed in 1989, and longer-term summer mission experiences called SWIM (Summer Workshops in Ministry), which ran from 1962 to 2001.

As early as 1920, annual youth conventions were a big focus of the organization’s work. They ran for more than 80 years, with a brief break during World War II, said Elizabeth Bosscher, Youth Unlimited’s communications and events coordinator.

“One hundred years of ministry have created ripple effects far beyond what we can imagine this side of heaven,” Bosscher said.

—Eliza Anderson