

## A Rich History

We came into being in the decade prior to the Civil War. Although the exact date of the organization is not known, we gather from the records of the Classis of Holland that the Rev. A. C. Van Raalte, D.D., was appointed organizer. Under his direction the first minutes for the church were written February 15, 1853, calling for a congregational meeting. Therefore, we are safe in saying that the First Reformed Church of Chicago had its beginning in February of 1853.

The first services were held at the home of Mr. Kroes. Mr. Vander Kooi was elected treasurer. They had no minister. The sermons were read by the Elders from a book of Dutch sermons. However, these sermons were so long that they could not be completed in one session and soon it is recorded they decided to look for a book of shorter sermons. They also agreed that the man reading the sermon should be standing.

Later on worship services were held in an empty store on Randolph and Desplaines Streets. After they had worshiped in a store for one year, the Rev. Bolks was called as pastor for our church, Hooge, and High Prairie (Roseland). However difficulties arose in regard to the regulations of preaching services and the combination was dissolved. Our church then raised enough money by subscriptions to call the Rev. Bolks to serve us alone, but he declined. Meanwhile the growing congregation felt the need for a church building and decided to buy a lot. A year later a lot was purchased for \$375.00 presumably on Foster Street, on half block east of Desplaines Street between Harrison and Polk Streets. On this site they decided to build a church of 60 feet by 40 feet, but financial difficulties forced them to change the dimensions to 20 feet by 30 feet.

In the year 1856 another attempt was made to secure the services of a minister. After \$324.00 had been subscribed for a salary, Rev. Mos of Schoonhoven, Netherlands was called. Nearly a year elapsed before they received a reply – a decline. They called a second time but were disappointed. The Rev. Van Leeuwen was temporarily engaged to lead them in their worship services for the sum of \$37.25 per month, at least so much was subscribed for him.

In October of 1856 the building of the new church was started. It was 20 feet by 45 feet, 15 feet longer than the previous plan and was built by members of



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the congregation. While struggling to complete the building, they were also attempting to procure a pastor. In August of 1857 they called the Rev. Oggel of Grand Haven, Michigan but he declined. They did not obtain a pastor until November of 1858, when the Rev. C. Vander Meulen accepted their call with a salary of \$600.00 per year. He arrived in March of 1859, and under his leadership the membership increased which led them to discuss plans for a new or enlarged building. In 1861 the Rev. Vander Meulen left and was succeeded by the Rev. Bolks, who stayed for only one year and then accepted a call to Roseland. The Rev. H. G. Klyn became supply pastor and in 1863 their regular pastor. During his ministry a parsonage was purchased for \$850.00. The Sunday School, which had been organized in 1859 became more mission minded. A Christian school was maintained where a Mr. Huisinga was the teacher. A greater interest in higher education was evident. By 1866 plans for a larger building were again being made and materialize in 1869 when a frame church was built at Harrison and May Streets. In this post-Civil War period immigration had increased greatly and the church grew by leaps and bounds. Since by this time the Rev. Klyn had gone, they called as their pastor a man well known to them in the Netherlands, the Rev

Bernardus De Bey, who arrived in 1868. People in the Netherlands who contemplated going to America were advised to go to Chicago and to Rev. De Bey's church. The Rev. De Bey served the church for 23 years longer than any other pastor in its history. His ministry was abundantly blessed for in the year 1877 alone he had the joy of receiving 120 souls on confession of their faith. In 1879, the year of the economic "Panic," he witnessed the paying off of the \$6000.00 remaining on the church debt.

In the meantime the Holland people began to spread over the city, resulting in the organization of the First Reformed Church of Englewood from the membership of the mother church in 1886. Also, the influence of Americanization was evidenced. The young people of the church desired to worship in the English language and as a result the Trinity Reformed Church was organized in 1889. Two years later came the close of the pastorate of Rev. De Bey. He was succeeded by the Rev. R. Bloemendaal who came in the same year, 1891.

A crowded condition within the church and an industrial development in the neighborhood forced the congregation to seek a new location for their house of worship. Lots were purchased at 1533 Hastings Street, just east of Ashland



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Avenue. On that site the church was built and dedicated to the service of the Lord in 1894. In the interval between leaving the Harrison Street church and the building of the new church, services were held in a hall on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Blue Island Avenue.

In 1895 when the Rev. J. Joldersma was pastor, the church reached her largest period of growth. In 1900 the Rev. H. Hammeling succeeded Rev. Joldersma; in 1907 the Rev. N. Boer became the pastor, to be succeeded in three years by the Rev. H. Schuurmans. In 1911, during Rev. Schuurman's time, the West Side Reformed Church was established, making her the third child of our church.

The Rev. H. Schipper became pastor in 1913. Seeing that the time was ripe, he guided the church into further paths of Americanization so that there was but one service weekly in the Holland language. In 1918 Rev. M. E. Broekstra assumed the pastorate and under his guidance the church continued to prosper and grow. He was succeeded in 1930 by the Rev. J. G. Brouwer, who left in 1932, to be followed by the Rev. B. R. Van Zyl, who served the congregation until 1943.

Beginning in the early 1920's families of the congregation started to move to the western suburbs. Due to this westward movement some felt it necessary to have a church in the suburban area – thus the Calvary Reformed Church was organized with Rev. R. Beckering as pastor. As more families continued to move westward it was realized that the church must be relocated. With this in mind First Reformed and Calvary Reformed merged in 1944, calling the Rev. H. Kik to be their pastor. Then the church property on Hastings Street was sold to the Shiloh Baptist Congregation and lots were purchased on Oak Park Avenue and 19<sup>th</sup> Street in Berwyn. It was around this time also that the final Americanization of the church was effected by dropping the Dutch language morning service. From then on all services have been conducted in the English language.

Upon the Berwyn property this building was built and dedicated December 8-10, 1948. During the transition period services were held in Timothy Christian School, Cicero; in West Side Reformed Church, Cicero; in a store at 6533 West Cermak Road, Berwyn; and in the United Presbyterian Church at Jackson Boulevard and Oak Park Avenue in Oak Park. Under the effective leadership of Rev. Kik the congregation untiedly weathered this difficult period of three years. In 1949 the Rev. Kik left us to be succeeded by the Rev.



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A. Dykhuizen who was installed in October, 1950. After a decade with the Dykhuizens, the Rev. Douglas van Gessel became our pastor in 1961. It was during this time that the name of the church was changed from First Reformed Church of Chicago to First Reformed Church of Berwyn. Upon the departure of Rev. van Gessel the Rev. Albert Van Dyke came in 1970. He departed in 1978 to be followed by the Rev. Harold Rust, who came in 1979.

During the pastorate of Rev. Rust the remaining members of West Side Church reunited with the congregation of First Berwyn in 1995. In 2000 Rev. Rust left.

Rev. Joseph Muyskens served as intern for 2000 and 2001 followed by Rev. Richard Nyboer who served as intern until 2008.

Rev. Richard Schuler was appointed by the Classis to coordinate care with the consistory for the benefit of this congregation.

In 2008 a new Consistory was formed headed by Rev. Richard Schuler and included Dennis Suda, Jim Meyer, and Rev. Earl Vander Wall. A rotation of ministers for preaching weekly and congregational care was established consisting of Rev. Walter Pickup, Rev. Henry Elgersma, and Pastor Henry Schueler.

Rev. Walter Pickup, Rev. Henry Elgersma, and Pastor Henry Schueler provided most of the care and preaching load but added to the mix to help out as needed were Rev. Maryteresa Orshonsky, Rev. Abiathar Carrol, Rev. Earl Vander Wall, Pastor Bob Kuiper, and Rev. Richard Schuler.

Jean Winter continued as church secretary, Mae Bolt coordinated Sunday activities and Joyce Fisher worked with lining up musicians.

In 2017 First Reformed Church of Berwyn and Bethel Reformed Church of Chicago merged and became CrossRoads Community Church with campuses in Berwyn and Chicago.

By 2018 after much prayer and consideration about the future of CrossRoads it was decided to leave the Reformed Church of America and become part of the ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians denomination.

In 2023 Rev. Richard Schuler was called home to his heavenly reward. Rev. Earl Vander Wall became the administrative pastor of CrossRoads Community Church at that time.

Today May 19, 2024 we will hold our last Sunday morning worship service of the Berwyn Campus but the story will continue on at the Chicago Campus!



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