



The History



of

Byron Center United Methodist Church

2490 Prescott St. SW Byron Center, MI 49315

A Christ Centered Church, Growing in Grace

*Committed to Serving the Community, Family and
World.*

The BCUMC History as I know it;
by Pastor Larry Nichols

The Byron Center United Methodist Church stands majestically with a towering steeple at the SW corner of Prescott St. and Freeland Ave., which is located one block south of 84th St. and one block west of Byron Center Ave. in Byron Township in the Village of Byron Center in Kent County, Michigan.

The following was found in a 1989 Byron Center UM Church Directory: "This picturesque old church, with its tall steeple pointing skyward has been a familiar land mark at the corner of Prescott and Freeland in the village of Byron Center for (many) years". This Church is "the oldest in the village".

The Sanctuary built in 1872/74 (the original part of the building) was wood framed with a stone foundation.

A basement of concrete and block walls and a concrete floor was excavated and added in 1942.

An extension (using similar materials) of 20 ft. was added to the south end of the church while the north end was extended beyond the steeple in

1962/63. These additions provided a new entry, a choir room, cry room, cloak room, kitchen, nursery and rest rooms.

The very large (nearly 4,000 square feet) Fellowship Hall and Education Wing were added in 1991/92. This addition provided a new entry with an elevator to access the upper and lower levels. A fellowship hall with a commercial kitchen, rest-rooms, a library and offices are on the upper level. A new nursery, rest rooms, exercise room, theater, class rooms, and a Christian education office are on the lower level.

In order for us to begin to understand how this church came to be here, we must pass back through time, and two denominational mergers and name changes: Byron Center Methodist Episcopal Church, Byron Center Methodist Church, and Byron Center United Methodist Church.

When this church (the sanctuary) was built in 1872-73, it was known as the Methodist Episcopal Church of Byron Center, and was organized within the denomination known as the Methodist Episcopal Church. Since its beginning in 1784, there became divisions within the Methodist Episcopal Church that were healed and the groups were reunited in 1939. This merger changed the denominations' name to the Methodist Church.

In 1968 the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged with the Methodist Church to form the present United Methodist Church.

As we sort through the mergers and pass back through time to the people that first worshipped here, and then built this edifice, we might ask; what brought the Methodists here? What kind of people chose this place and denomination to be their own? In order to answer these questions, we must begin with John Wesley, the founding father of the Methodists.

Methodists here and around the world owe their theology, structure, and enthusiasm to their founder, John Wesley. Wesley, a priest of the Church of England, was one of nineteen children born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley in the early 18th Century in the rural village of Epworth, England. Samuel Wesley was an Anglican priest and rector of the Epworth parish church. Susanna was a woman of uncommon zeal, intelligence, and character who was likely the most important human influence on John Wesley's life.

Throughout his boyhood, student years, and early priesthood, John Wesley focused his life on rigorously trying to satisfy the demands of religion as he understood them. His vigor and passion for discipline led to the derogatory name of "Methodist" from his friends and colleagues. But,

his efforts (works righteousness) led ultimately to a sense of despair, failure, and anxiety about his relationship to God. Then, at a prayer meeting in Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738, he discovered when his heart was “strangely warmed,” what Paul and Luther before him had learned, that a new relationship with God comes through faith in Christ rather than through our own efforts. In addition, he experienced the absolute assurance that God had taken away his sins and saved him from the law of sin and death.

After this event, John Wesley and his brother, Charles, (who also had a similar experience about that same time) began spreading their new found Gospel of God’s love. They preached to the poor, to the miners and factory workers of industrial England, and to others who generally found themselves outside of the sober and respectable Church of England.

Charles Wesley wrote thousands of hymns, many of which are enjoyed throughout Christianity even to this day. Hymns such as; “O for a Thousand Tongues to sing”, (Easters’) “Christ the Lord is Risen Today”, “Love Divine, all Loves Excelling”, and (Christmas’) “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”.

Although John and Charles remained Anglican priests and encouraged participation in the sacraments of the Church of England, their preaching, teaching, writing, organizational skills, and inspirational leadership founded a movement which was to have worldwide implications.

In 1766, three lay Methodists, Philip Embury, Robert Strawbridge and Barbara Heck began missionary work in the American Colonies. Three years later, Wesley sent lay preachers Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore to the Colonies and in 1771, he sent Francis Asbury who was destined to become the Father of American Methodism. By the close of the War for Independence, there were nearly 15,000 Methodists in America and 80 lay preachers.

However, the War for Independence had left the Methodists in America without the means of celebrating Baptisms and Holy Communion because virtually all of the Anglican priests had returned to England. In response to this situation, John Wesley ordained Thomas Coke as a superintendent and sent him to America where he was to ordain Francis Asbury as a second superintendent and to establish an American Methodist Church. On Christmas Eve, 1784, some sixty lay preachers met in a conference in Baltimore with Coke and Asbury. Wesley had sent a form for Sunday worship, a simplified version of the English Book of Common Prayer, and an edited version of the Anglican Articles of Religion. At this historic Christmas Conference, the American Methodists elected, ordained

and consecrated Bishops Coke and Asbury, edited and adopted the liturgy and doctrinal statement sent by Wesley, and prayerfully established the Methodist Episcopal Church in America.

Several American denominations trace their heritage to that historic Baltimore Christmas Conference of 1784. The United Methodist Church is the most direct descendant of the Methodist Episcopal Church created that Christmas. However, the United Methodist Church today is the result of two significant denominational mergers. The first union, in 1939, brought together the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church South, which had been separated since just before the Civil War. The Methodist Protestant Church, which had separated from the main body in 1830, also merged at that time. These three reunited to form the largest Protestant denomination in America in 1939, The Methodist Church.

Then, after years of negotiation with the Evangelical United Brethren Church (itself a product of a union in 1946 of the Evangelical Church and the church of the United Brethren in Christ) merged with the Methodist Church. The Methodist and the Evangelical United Brethren Churches were joined in 1968 to form the United Methodist Church.

In general, as our new nation grew so did America's churches. It has been said that, the Methodist Episcopal Church was the newest of the early American denominations, yet became the fastest growing of them all.

The following was found in The Methodist Primer pg. 23

Methodist Evangelistic Materials (printed about 1962)

“After the historic Christmas Conference (1784), the Methodist Episcopal Church in America had a steady and substantial growth. It extended its boundaries; strengthened its Episcopacy; ordained preachers, began writing a Discipline, setting forth a constitution and body of law to govern the Church; increased the number and functions of the Annual Conferences; divided the Annual Conferences into districts; created the office of Presiding Elder (District Superintendent); held revivals and camp meetings from one end of the nation to the other; carried the gospel where it had never been; founded schools and colleges; gathered into its membership people of all races and class; established missions and built churches all over the nation.”

“Annual Conferences” – The United Methodist church is organizationally and territorially divided into Annual Conferences which is then divided into Districts. The Annual Conferences are presided over by a

Bishop and the Districts, under the Bishops guidance, by a Superintendent. We currently belong to the West Michigan Annual Conference and are in the Grand Rapids District.

As our nation grew beyond the 13 colonies/states, pioneers began to move into and to settle the Northwest Territory and remote places like Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. As new places, towns and villages developed the need for the church followed.

*The following was found in The story of American Methodism pg. 151
By Frederick A. Norwood*

“The spread of Methodism into the rest of the Northwest Territory followed in order – except for Michigan, which received its beginnings from Canada after the War of 1812. The career of Alfred Brunson, the long-lived curmudgeon of the old northwest frontier, covers the development of Methodism during this stage. When he was sent to Detroit, he wondered why he, with a large family, was sent to so forsaken a circuit (fourteen members in the city and a hundred thirty on the whole circuit). He speculated that the purpose was ‘to try me, and decide whether I would obey the appointing power.’ His circuit included the entire (Michigan) territory except Sault St. Marie, and counted preaching places in Pontiac and along rivers like Clinton and Rouge and Raisin, down to Maumee, and back along the lake road fifty-eight miles to Detroit. It took a month to get around the twelve preaching appointments.”

It’s hard for me to imagine Detroit ever being that remote. The early circuit riders aimed to follow the settlers just as soon as possible after they came in to new country. Generally, the pioneers built their cabins near springs or in the river valleys. A travelling preacher might know the name of a former Methodist family but much more often the people he met were all strangers. In any case, he tried to stop at every cabin, inquired for any Methodist, and announce he had come to preach. Either he delivered a sermon right then and there or announced a time for a service in a day or two. This gave that family time to notify any and all of the neighbors.

*The following was found in the Methodist Church In Michigan: 19th Century pg. 10
By Dr. Margaret B. Macmillan*

“...Territorial and State boundaries did not mean very much to the members of those early Annual Conferences. Circuit riders went

anywhere that they heard or thought that their services might be needed. Before 1840, wandering Circuit riders from New York, Genesee, Ohio, and Indiana Annual Conferences had all preached in Michigan. The connectional Methodist Episcopal Church was extending its network of societies and classes to the frontier in Michigan.”

Michigan had grown enough by 1836 that a Michigan Methodist Episcopal Annual Conference was created. Before that, Ohio and Indiana Annual Conferences formally sent preachers and organized societies, circuits and classes. The societies were made up of several classes and classes were small groups that met in homes or schoolhouses. After the societies and classes grew enough, a church building was considered.

The following was found in the Methodist Church In Michigan: 19th Century pg. 125 *By Dr. Margaret B. Macmillan*

“The growth of the Grand River Mission was different from most of the other Circuits. It was established in 1835 with Osband Monette as the assigned minister. His Circuit ran from the mouth of the Looking Glass River at Portland all the way along the Grand River to Grand Haven. Less than 500 people lived in the village of Grand Rapids then. Monette labored hard and reported twenty-seven members in 1836 where none had been previously.”

The Byron Township was organized and defined in the south/west corner of Kent County in the Territory of Michigan in 1836. Michigan became a State in 1837.

The following was found in an old church history The Byron Center Methodist Church pg 1

by Mrs. Clara Charlotte Cheyne, Church Historian

“As of this writing we have not been able to establish the exact age of the Byron Center Methodist Church. However, the earliest records available dated April 13, 1861, show that from some time before that date Byron Center Church (Class) was a part of the Kelloggsville Circuit. Kelloggsville is located on U. S. 131 south of Grand Rapids.”

Accordingly, on that date, the 3rd Quarterly Conference of the Circuit was held at the Byron class meeting place, probably in the old McKenney School located one mile west of Byron Center.

That was 1861, and notice that Clara says that the Kelloggsville Circuit had been in place for some time. On page two, it is noted that the Circuit had its own parsonage at Kelloggsville.

The following was found in the Methodist Church In Michigan: 19th Century pg. 147 By Dr. Margaret B. Macmillan

“In 1847, (Rev. Stephen) Woodward organized a new Circuit around Grand Rapids. He knew of two established preaching places in the entire area when he went there. By the end of the Conference year, he had nine preaching places and 120 members to report.”

I believe that this reference could very well have been the beginning of this Church. Interestingly, it was recorded in the minutes of the Michigan Methodist Episcopal Annual Conference in 1847 that there were only 4 Church buildings in the Grand Rapids District and 6 Parsonages. This meant that some Circuits, such as the Kelloggsville Circuit, had parsonages before they had Church buildings.

Interestingly, also in 1847 the State of Michigan Legislature selected a site for the permanent Capitol of the State in Lansing instead of Detroit.

In 1856, the Methodist Episcopal Church in Michigan had grown enough to form two Annual Conferences, Michigan & Detroit. We of course, were part of the Michigan Annual Conference.

Here are some interesting things to note.

Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States in 1860. With his election the Civil War began in 1861.

The following was found in the Methodist Church In Michigan: 19th Century pg. 210 By Dr. Margaret B. Macmillan

“The Methodist Episcopal Church made a real patriotic contribution during the Civil War. No Methodist should forget Lincoln’s reply to a delegation from the General Conference of 1864, ... (Lincoln said) ‘The Methodist Church sends more soldiers to the field, more nurses to the hospitals, and more prayers to Heaven than any’.”

The Civil War ended in the spring of 1865.

On April 14, 1865 Abraham Lincoln was assassinated.

Meanwhile in the Byron area.

The Classes that made up the Kelloggsville Circuit varied from time to time. In 1862 there were 5 Classes: South Dorr, Dorr, S.W. Byron,

Byron, and Kelloggsville. In 1864 an East Byron was added to the list. That all had to do with Schoolhouses and/or meeting places. At that time, Byron seemed to be the strongest of the Classes.

A North/South Railroad running through Michigan was built through the center of Byron Township and completed in March of 1870. In reaction to that, the village of Byron Center was platted in 1872. The original Village had 59 lots, most of them were 66' wide (E/W) and 132' deep (N/S). The area of the original Village was; Byron Center Avenue on the east and it ran about 3 ½ blocks west to the railroad, and it began at 84th St. on the north and ran 2 blocks south. This placed the new Methodist Episcopal Church in the center of the original town.

So, as the village of Byron Center was being platted, one of the first buildings in town was the Byron Center Methodist Episcopal Church.

The following was found in an old church history The Byron Center Methodist Church pg 20 & 21

by Mrs. Clara Charlotte Cheyne, Church Historian

“From another old book we pick up interesting items from the records of the Board of Trustees of Byron Center (Methodist Society) beginning January 5, 1872.” ... “The first motion in order (was) that we agree to build a M.E. Church at Byron Center 36'X56'.” (After the trustees held several meetings about land purchase, on February 9, 1872); “This time the Board took action to buy a lot on which to build a church. Hulbert Colwell, S. A. McKenney and Thomas Hirst were named as building committee, and another motion carried that the building was to be 36'X56' as mentioned before.”

So, in 1872 work began on our church Sanctuary, which was wood-framed with a stone foundation, in this small new village of Byron Center.

In 1873, the Kelloggsville M.E. Circuit sold the parsonage at Kelloggsville, (which evidently was replaced with one at Byron Center) then the Byron Class was no longer a Class but became the Byron Center M.E. Church, and the Circuit was renamed the Byron Center Circuit.

Over time many of the Classes merged and joined this new church.

The following was found in an old church history The Byron Center Methodist Church pg 14

by Mrs. Clara Charlotte Cheyne, Church Historian

“Byron Center was now no longer a class but a church and the trustees

were: O. Ide, J. K. McKenney, S. A. McKenney, G. G. Graves, O. Goodspeed, and G. A. Spencer.”

The Byron Township Hall, (now the Museum) which also housed the area Library for a time, was built in 1876.

The following was found in an old church history The Byron Center Methodist Church pg 21

by Mrs. Clara Charlotte Cheyne, Church Historian

According to that same pg. (21) of this church history, the building was completed and “was dedicated on February 18, 1874”. ... The “First quarterly meeting held at Byron Center M. E. Church (was) February 21 and 22, 1874. Rev. D. F. Barnes, Presiding Elder was present,” ... Rev. Barnes also “preached Sunday evening to a large congregation. ... Fifty three partook of the Sacrament” (Holy Communion)
(The office of Presiding Elder is now called the District Superintendent.)

The appointed Byron Center ME Church & Circuit Pastor in 1874 was Rev. J.S Valentine

This must have been quite a week of celebration; on Wednesday – the new church building dedication, on Saturday – the quarterly conference for the new Byron Center circuit, and on Sunday – Worship services, (morning and evening) all with the D.S. present.

Here’s a couple of interesting things to note.

In 1876 the United States celebrated its hundredth birthday by a “Centennial Exposition” in Philadelphia. Three million people visited the exposition and many were curious about a new gadget called a telephone presented by Alexander Graham Bell.

In 1879 Thomas Edison took out his US patent on a thing called the Light Bulb.

In the next 26 (1874-1900) years, the Byron Center Methodist Episcopal Church had many projects for improvement; such as adding sheds for the sake of the Pastor’s and attendee’s horses, as well as several maintenance and remodeling projects.

According to a 1907 Kent County Atlas, the village of Byron Center

had expanded. A block and a half of lots (48) had been added north of 84th street to the village of Byron Center. This meant that the ME Church and the Township Hall were no longer center of town.

And now, let's move forward beyond the turn of the century.

Here are some other interesting things to note.

On December 17, 1903, the Wright brothers took their famous flight.

On April 6, 1917, the US entered World War I. In 1921, peace treaties with Germany and Austria were signed.

In 1927, Charles Lindbergh was the first to fly non-stop from New York to Paris.

In Oct. 1929, the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began.

A merger in 1939 within the Methodist Episcopal denomination changed our name to the Byron Center Methodist Church. The merger in 1939 brought together the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church South, which had been separated since just before the Civil War, and the Methodist Protestant Church, which had separated from the main body in 1830. As I said before, "these three reunited to form the largest Protestant denomination in America in 1939, The Methodist Church." In 1940, both of the Michigan Annual Conferences as well as the local churches began reorganizing, and renaming the women's group, the youth group and celebrating this great Unification.

During these past many years, this congregation has gathered from time to time to reevaluate its place and purpose here in Byron Center and to consider whether to expand and adjust the building in order to meet the needs of an ever-changing membership.

The following was found in a 1997 Byron Center UM Church Directory: A History of The Byron Center United Methodist Church pg. 2 by Jayne Stebbins

"Shortly after the building was completed, (1874) a need for more space became apparent. Plans for building a basement were discussed at various times and twice the project had been started and money donated. During the Depression, the funds were lost in the bank closure and plans for the basement were abandoned. Finally, in 1942, the Women's Society for Christian Service (this name was the proud new name of the women's group) took full responsibility for the basement project and with much

volunteer labor, the project was completed. Also, during the last half of the 1940's, the brick parsonage was built.”

On March 30, 1942, the work was started to build a church basement. This basement project was no simple task. It meant that the building had to be supported while the old stone foundation was removed and then dirt under the church had to be excavated and removed before a new foundation and basement walls and floor were constructed.

The following was found in an old church history The Byron Center Methodist Church pg 37, 38.

by Mrs. Clara Charlotte Cheyne, Church Historian

“All during the excavating and building, worship services and all other church activities went on uninterrupted, though often with discomfort. Since the old furnace had to be removed early in the work, the church had to be heated with kerosene stoves.”

Here are some other interesting historical notes.

With the Presidential election of 1940, President F. D. Roosevelt became the first and only President to serve more than 2 4-year terms.

On December 7, 1941 the US entered World War II when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. After being re-elected for a fourth term, President Roosevelt died in April of 1945. World War II ended in Sept. of 1945.

The following was found in an old church history The Byron Center Methodist Church pg. 39

by Mrs. Clara Charlotte Cheyne, Church Historian

“During a terrific summer thunder storm in 1944, lightning struck the steeple and completely wrecked it. Fire started high up in the loosely hanging boards. Valiant volunteer fireman succeeded in keeping the damage to a minimum. Soon the steeple was rebuilt and covered with aluminum.”

The following was also found on pg. 39

“In the last half of the 1940's the old parsonage was sold to Howard Marritt and moved a short way to the east and across the street. A new basement was built at the old parsonage site and a new brick parsonage

was built.”

As the Christianity grew over the centuries and developed and redeveloped itself, it changed from being “one church” to many divisions and denominations, which in turn offered many doctrines and theologies. Around 1914 an ultra conservative group that called themselves “Fundamentalist” began to have an influence on many of the mainline denominations and local churches and even began independent local churches and or denominations of their own. Because of this ever-growing influence, in 1955 the Byron Center Methodist Church experienced a congregational split of its own.

The following was found in an old church history The Byron Center Methodist Church pg. 40

by Mrs. Clara Charlotte Cheyne, Church Historian

“Rev. Jerry A. Paulson, new in the Methodist Church and just entering the ministry was assigned to the Byron Center Methodist Church in June of 1954.

It soon became evident that he, like the two preceding pastors ... was not in harmony with Methodism. he began referring to our church as ‘Fundamental’. For approximately ten years (prior to this) our congregation received little or no information regarding the beliefs and work of the Methodist Church.

Then in late February of 1955 Rev. Paulson announced to the congregation that ‘whether you like it or not’ this church was due for a split” ... and that he and a few followers opposed Methodism and ... “accused the denomination of being Communists and anti-Christ among other things.

Rev. Maurice D. McKean was District Superintendent at the time, and after several heartbreaking meetings a vote was taken as to whether or not this church was to remain a Methodist Church. The vote for remaining a Methodist Church was strong enough in favor to remain as such. ‘Thanks be to God.’ (Clara’s delightful added expletive)

Rev. Paulson and some thirty followers left and immediately formed the Byron Center Undenominational Church, later called the Byron Center Bible Church.”

The Byron Center Methodist Church has had a long and proud history of being a strongly conservative church. In fact, this entire area is strongly

conservative and is sometimes known as the “Bible Belt of Michigan”. These folks were and still are conservative; they just weren’t quite that radically conservative.

When the Byron Center Methodist Church experienced the congregational split in 1955, it left them without a pastor.

The following was found in an old church history The Byron Center Methodist Church pg. 41

by Mrs. Clara Charlotte Cheyne, Church Historian

“At the Annual Conference of 1955, Rev. Clarence Hutchens was assigned to Byron Center, who in accepting the charge faced a great challenge. Through God’s grace he met the challenge.”

Rev. Hutchens must have been a very caring and skilled pastor. He conducted “Methodist” membership training classes for those remaining members as well as classes for any new potential members. This seemed to stabilize the church and strengthened it spiritually. Sixteen new members were added that year.

Rev. Hutchens was real busy that year, (1955) not only did he bring stabilization to the Byron Center Church but he was a key player in a new church start. A new Methodist church was started in the area called the Wesley Park Methodist Church. And it seems that for a short time we became a two point charge. (The two churches share their pastor)

The following was also found on pg. 41

“A new congregation called Wesley Park Methodist Church was started, receiving their charter on September 25, 1955 in a service held on the site of the future church building – a six acre plot ... The Byron Center church helped in getting the new congregation started ... The first church service was held in June 1955 in the neighborhood schoolhouse. Rev. Clarence Hutchens (pastor of the Byron Center church) ... was also assigned to this new congregation ...”

Also the following was found on pg. 42

“The Wesley Park congregation grew so rapidly that it demanded all of Rev. Hutchens’s time and in June 1957 Rev. Herschel E. Murray was assigned to this (the Byron Center Methodist) church.”

Ironically, the Byron Center Methodist Church had a hand in two new “area” church starts in 1955: Painfully, the Byron Center Bible Church, and

joyfully the Wesley Park Methodist Church.

The Byron Center Methodist Church must have recovered nicely from this setback because, in the early 1960's under the leadership and guidance of Rev. Donald A. Russell, two additions were built onto the church and the interior of the church was completely remodeled.

The following was found in an old church history The Byron Center Methodist Church pg. 44

by Mrs. Clara Charlotte Cheyne, Church Historian

“An extension of 20 ft. to the south end of the church was planned, and the front was to be extended beyond the steeple and the basement enlarged accordingly. The extensions provided (a new entry), a choir room, cry room, cloak room, kitchen, nursery and rest rooms. Folding partitions provide class rooms. A (new) gas furnace provides warmth.

All new pews, new altar railing, pulpit and other furnishings were added. ... Folding chairs, typewriter, mimeograph and power mower were provided.”

Also the following was found on pages 44 & 45

“On Thursday evening, April 4, 1963, open house was held in the reopened church. ... On Sunday, April 7, 1963 District Superintendent Keith Avery and Bishop Marshall Reed participated in the Service of Consecration.” ... (That same afternoon) ... “a Homecoming Service was held. Many former pastors and members as well as friends and visitors were welcomed by the regular congregation.”

The following was found in a 1997 Byron Center UM Church Directory: A History of The Byron Center United Methodist Church pg. 2 by Jayne Stebbins

“During the late 1960's and early 1970's growth in the church was rather minimal. We did, however, purchase an Allen electric organ. The exterior of the church was covered with white vinyl siding, eliminating the job of painting, which was especially hazardous on the steeple. New carpet was laid in the downstairs and narthex and redecorating and general repairs were accomplished at the parsonage.”

The Methodist and the Evangelical United Brethren Churches merged

in 1968 to form the United Methodist Church which changed our name to the Byron Center United Methodist Church. (BCUMC)

The Byron Center and surrounding area experienced rapid growth in the 1980's.

In July 1987, Rev. William Doublestein was appointed as our pastor. Under his leadership and guidance the church also began to experience rapid growth. And the problem of adequate space, once again, became most apparent. Especially while trying to maintain and grow an ever-expanding Sunday School program.

The following is found on the Byron Center UM Church 2010 Web Site: www.byroncenterchurch.org pg. About Us

Web Master, Todd Piper

“After many months of serious study, it was decided that we should enlarge our present structure. At a special Charge Conference on August 18, 1991, the congregation approved the purchase of a condominium to be used as the parsonage and accepted the bid of Robert Weaver Construction in the amount of \$450,000 for the construction of the Fellowship Hall and Education Wing. In addition, the original structure was to be remodeled and the parking area extended. Ground breaking services were held on Sunday, October 20, 1991.

Before construction could begin, the parsonage had to be removed. It was sold and moved to its new foundation at 2437 - 87th Street. When the parsonage was built in 1948, it replaced the original parsonage which dated to the 1870's. The older building was also moved to a new location. It now stands at 2443 Prescott Street and is the residence of a member of our congregation.

Construction of the new addition began during the winter of 1991-1992. Workers labored in the rain, mud, snow, and bitter cold to keep the project on schedule. By the spring of 1992, we had created a beautiful new addition. On Saturday, June 13, 1992, the first wedding was celebrated in the new, but still unfinished, Fellowship Hall.”

On Saturday afternoon (4pm), November 7, 1992 the new addition was dedicated to God. The Rev. Dr. Charles Garrod (DS), David Pries (Building Committee Chair), and Rev. Bill Doublestein participated in the service.

As mentioned before, “This addition provided a new entry with an elevator to access the upper and lower levels. A fellowship hall with a

commercial kitchen, rest-rooms, a library and offices are on the upper level. A new nursery, rest rooms, exercise room, theater, class rooms, and a Christian education office are on the lower level.”

Rev. Bill Doublestein holds the distinction of serving this church longer than any other pastor in its history. Check out the list of pastors. Most had served 2 to 5 years. He served from July of 1987 through June of 2004, 17 years! During Pastor Bill’s time here the church attendance grew to the point of needing two worship services. So, the church began to offer two worship times and two different styles (Contemporary and Traditional). A lot of new programs and ministries were also started.

Also during Pastor Bill’s pastorate the condominium/parsonage was sold and a house/parsonage was purchased on Meadow Haven Drive.

The following is found on the Byron Center UM Church 2010 Web Site: www.byroncenterchurch.org pg. About Us

Web Master, Todd Piper

“In June 2004 we had a pastoral change. The Rev. C. Greene became our new pastor. In May 2005 the church voted in a Town Hall (meeting) to purchase 27 acres as an extension campus.”

On June 30, 2005 The Byron Center UMC became the new owners of 27 acres. This land is west of Byron Center on Homerich Ave. and is just across Homerich from the BC West Middle School. The 27 acres are intended as an extension ministry campus. In July 2005 there was a special gathering at the site to ask God to bless the land in a special Blessing Service. The dream and intent is to use this land to build other facilities beyond this church building such as perhaps a gymnasium, ball fields, or any other facilities that would enhance and grow God’s work here at Byron Center. There is even a proposed rendition (blueprint) of what the future extension campus might look like. In the fall of 2005 the church launched a Capital Stewardship Campaign called: “Acts 2: serving family, community and world together”. Because of a bad economy and changing times we continue to work beyond that initial campaign to pay off all our debt. And the Acts 2 team continues to find creative ways to keep this wonderful dream alive and in front of the people as well as to pay off the land purchase debt.

From time to time churches experience setbacks, hardships and struggles. Sometimes people don’t like a worship style or a doctrinal stand or a proposed goal or there may perhaps be personality conflicts. Anyone of those things or a host of others can cause setbacks and struggles. The Byron

Center UMC, as this history has already often shared, is no stranger to setbacks, hardships and struggles.

In the latter part of the last decade (2007-2010) the Byron Center UM Church had experienced just such a setback. Worship attendance waned to the point of returning to only one worship service on Sunday. The paid staff had to be eliminated or moved to volunteer status. As a result, many of the programs struggled for survival. The Ministry Shares (Apportionments) for 2009 were only paid in part. It was time once again for changes.

In the spring/summer of 2010 the Byron Center UMC leadership was bound and determined that a new day was beginning, and that we would re-adjust our programs, ministries and even our worship style for a fresh new start. The contemporary/traditional worship style once offered became a blended style. The Christian Education department began to rebuild itself. Some programs and ministries were restarted. Also in the summer of 2010 the parsonage on Meadow Haven Dr. underwent some major renovation (new; furnace, air conditioner, floor coverings and paint throughout; just to name a few) with mostly volunteer workers.

The occasion of the writing of this History is the celebration of 20 years (“The Last Score of Many”) since the ground-breaking for the Fellowship Hall/Education Wing on October 20, 1991. On the weekend of October 22/23, 2011 there are plans for a Saturday “October Fest” community celebration, and then a Special Sunday morning worship service with a time of fellowship and then an all Church Potluck following the Sunday School hour.

This Church has an amazing story (history). The ministry here began when our State, County, Township, and Town were just coming into existence. And as I stand in center of this church’s sanctuary I realize that it has been a rich and full 6 score and 17 years ago that this was a brand new place. It has seen two World Wars, the Great Depression, and a host of other world and local events that helped shape it. It has faced building projects, sprints of rapid growth and expansion, times of struggles and hardships, and most often years of stable and steady ministry to God in and for this place called Byron Center. As Clara once said “Thanks be to God.”

So, as I see it, (the “Gospel according to Larry”) with God’s help and guidance, we will continue to honor our past, celebrate our present and commit to the future together.

May God bless you with all of God's love & grace.
Pastor Larry