

GRACE REFORMED CHURCH
CELEBRATES 100TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. VERNON J. EHLERS

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 1997

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Grace Reformed Church in Wyoming, MI. The names and faces of pastors and the location of the church may have changed over the years, but the spiritual mission and commitment of Grace Reformed Church have become stronger with each year of existence.

The history of the church actually dates back 101 years to 1896 when members of the Second Reformed Church and the Fifth Reformed Church met at Reelman's Hall to discuss combining their congregations. On February 18, 1897, the two churches formed Grace Reformed Church. Ten days later the congregation ordained and installed its first consistory, consisting of two elders and two deacons. The Rev. John Van De Erve served as the church's first pastor until 1901. During his 4 year tenure, Reverend Van De Erve oversaw the construction of a temporary facility to help ease the congestion problem Reelman Hall was experiencing. In 1899, the growing congregation began construction on a new church that would be dedicated during a 2 day service in April 1900.

Following the departure of Reverend Van De Erve, the congregation experienced a number of changes in the pulpit. In 1902, the Rev. J. H. Joldersma served as pastor for a 6 month period. He was replaced by the Rev. P.P. Cheff from 1903 to 1905. After Reverend Cheff's departure, Rev. Peter Braak took over as pastor and oversaw the construction of a new parsonage that was built on the grounds of the church so that pastors would no longer have to live in nearby rented apartments. After a 3 year assignment, Reverend Braak moved on and was replaced by the Rev. Lawrence Dykstra who served until 1912.

In 1912, the church began to move in a new direction with the introduction of the Rev. C.H. Spaan who to this day has served the longest tenure as pastor at the church. Reverend Spaan was a fixture at Grace Reformed for 26 years until poor health forced him to give up his duties in 1938. During his ministry, church members generously donated their time to help with several major improvement projects including the installation of a steam heating plant and the expansion of the auditorium's seating capacity. In addition, the church also built a new basement and added a new kitchen for church social events.

After the retirement of Reverend Spaan, the church welcomed the Rev. Theodore Schaap who served from 1938 to 1945. In October of 1945, the church welcomed the Rev. Henry C. Van Deelen to the congregation. During Reverend Van Deelen's pastorship, plans were made to establish a building fund for future expansion and remodeling projects and a celebration committee was established to prepare for the church's 50th anniversary in 1947.

In 1949, the Rev. Abraham Rynbrandt was installed as pastor and served until 1953. He was replaced by the Rev. James Schut in 1954 who remained with the church until 1959. The Rev. Rodger H. Dalman began service in 1959 and stayed with the church until 1965. During the early 1960's the church, under Dalman's leadership, moved forward

with plans to build a new sanctuary at a new location. In 1963 the congregation approved preliminary building plans for their new home.

In 1964, the church sold their building on Caulfield Avenue and moved into a new facility on Burlingame Avenue. After selling their previous place of worship to New Hope Baptist Church, members of both churches held a joint worship service to celebrate a new beginning for both congregations. During the transition period, church members attended worship services at Lee High School while the finishing touches were being put on their new home. On April 26, worshippers celebrated their first Sunday in their new sanctuary and later held a week-long dedication ceremony to celebrate.

In 1965, the Reverend Dalman left the church for a new position in Wisconsin. He was replaced in 1966 by the Rev. Harry Brower who served until 1972. Rev. Mark De Witt was installed as pastor in 1973 and remained until 1985. During Reverend De Witt's service, the church dedicated a new pastor's study, consistory room, and nursery. The church also enlarged its seating area for worship services. Phase two of this improvement project was completed in 1990 and included an elevator and a covered lower entrance.

Rev. Louis H. Benes, Jr. was installed as pastor in 1986 and served for 10 years. On September 29, 1996, the Rev. Richard Veenstra was commissioned as interim pastor and remains in that position today.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, Grace Reformed Church has come a long way from its humble beginning and has been an integral part of the Wyoming community for a century. The contributions of this church, its tradition, and commitment to God should serve as an example for others to follow. As the members of this church celebrate this remarkable feat, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating them on this very special anniversary.

STATEMENT FOR THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD IN CELEBRATION OF POLISH CONSTITUTION DAY—MAY 3, 1997

HON. GERALD D. KLECZKA

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 1997

Mr. KLECZKA. Mr. Speaker, May 3 marks the 206th anniversary of Europe's first written constitution.

It may come as a surprise to some that this constitution was produced in Poland. Scholars tell us the document was conceived in the spirit of the U.S. Constitution, which preceded it by just 4 years. It established the radical principle that the power to govern emanates from the people.

The Polish Constitution was signed in 1791, after 3 years of intense debate. It was the product of King Stanislaw August's renovation of the country. It recast Poland-Lithuania as a hereditary monarchy and abolished many of the eccentric and antiquated features of the old system. It ended the individual veto in Parliament and provided a separation of powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. It established an elected judiciary, trial by jury, the concept of habeas corpus, and freedom of religion.

All this was done without bloodshed.

Nevertheless, the nobility saw the new constitution as a challenge to their stature. Its passage also alarmed autocratic states such

as Russia, who viewed it as a threat to their domination of Poland.

In 1792, domestic and foreign reactionaries ended the democratization of Poland. Polish conservatives formed a confederation and appealed to Russia to restore the status quo. Enlisting Prussia's support, Russia invaded Poland under the pretext of defending its ancient liberties. Stanislaw August capitulated. France, Russia, and Prussia abrogated the Polish Constitution, carried out a second partition of Poland in 1793 and placed the remainder of the country under Russian occupation.

Despite this defeat, the democratic ideals of the Polish Constitution lived on in the citizens who played a leading role in bringing an end to communism in Eastern Europe. And they continue to live on in a democratic Poland, borne of struggle.

Although the Polish Constitution was never implemented, it has gained an honored position in the Polish political heritage. Poland celebrates the anniversary of its passage as the country's most important civic holiday.

I'm proud to be of Polish descent and to honor Polish Constitution Day.

CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF THE HISTORIC PLYMOUTH CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMS

HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 1997

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, today, it gives me great pleasure to participate in the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims which will begin this weekend, May 2 to 4, 1997.

Known as the "Grand Central Depot" of the Underground Railroad, the Plymouth Church was founded in 1847. Rev. Henry Ward Beecher was the first minister of the historic Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims and was considered to have been America's foremost clergyman of the 19th century. Beecher understood the value of using the church as an instrument for social reform and he took his influence beyond the pulpit and built Plymouth Church into a national institution. As in 1849, major political and social issues were challenged, especially equal rights for all America. Plymouth Church is in fact famous for having bought the freedom of a young slave girl, "Pinky," who once freed, became highly educated and returned to the church as an adult to thank them for her freedom. In keeping with the long tradition of the church, Plymouth continues to provide a wide array of services to the needy and less fortunate.

The landmark 1849 church building, which was designed to seat 2,050, was built to accommodate the overflow crowds who came to hear Beecher's legendary sermons. Other noted leaders who spoke from the pulpit include, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mark Twain. It is the only church ever visited by President Abraham Lincoln in New York City.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you join me and our colleagues in recognizing the historic contributions of the Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims for the last 150 years.