

North Kent Bible Church

HISTORY

Many people have asked about the history of the North Kent Bible Church. The following is a brief history from the faulty archives of my memory cells. I have done my best to have dates and details verified by involved parties.

The Michigan State Conference and especially the three Grand Rapids Area Churches felt led to start a new church in the Northern Kent County area. At the time there were lifetime Church of God families living in Northern Kent County. The town of Rockford was selected due to a strong and steady population growth. The state conference contacted the Church of God General Conference at that time located in Oregon, Illinois. The general conference was very interested and supportive of starting a new church in the Rockford, Michigan area. Pastor Dick Eldred, former member of the Blanchard Church of God and presently serving as the pastor of the East Oregon Chapel was contacted to see if he felt called and was willing to be the church planting pastor in Rockford, Michigan. Dick and wife Carol agreed to come to Rockford.

In the summer of 1984 the Eldred's moved to Michigan. A calling team from the Bible College came up for a week blitz of neighborhoods to invite and promote the North Kent Bible Church. The first services were held on Sunday, September 9, 1984 in the Community room of the Independent State Bank. There were over 70 people that first Sunday. It became apparent that more room was needed. After meeting in the Independent Bank's Community Room for one month, North Kent moved to the old gym at Parkside Elementary School on Lewis Street.

Enough praise cannot be given to the leadership that Dick and Carol Eldred provided the infant North Kent Bible Church. Carol doubled as church treasurer those early months. Dick was well prepared to start a new church; he had worked as a truck driver, had run his own welding business, built three houses and was very instrumental in helping the East Oregon Church to grow. I am always amazed at how God plans and puts the right people in the right places with the skills and strengths to do the work He has called them to do. Without the leadership of Dick and Carol, the North Kent Bible Church would not have been successful.

It is important to acknowledge the financial and prayer support that we received from the Michigan State Conference and Church of God General Conference. Without their support in those early years, North Kent would not have survived.

It is important to mention the financial and prayer support of Rhoda Hanson. Rhoda and her husband, Will, were lifetime members of the Grand Rapids area churches,

Pennellwood and later Garden Park. Will and Rhoda lived on the family farm that had belonged to Rhoda's family in Gaines Township. Will and Rhoda lived very frugally. We could go into many humorous stories about Rhoda, but we will save that for another time. Will and Rhoda did not spend money on their selves, but were very generous to the Church. They loaned money to many of our current churches when they were started. Loans paid off were reinvested in other churches. Rhoda made many loans and gifts to the North Kent Bible Church when the current building was built. Upon her death, those loans per her request were marked paid in full. Rhoda used to tell Pastor Dick that she wasn't worth much anymore; all she could do was pray. Pastor Dick referred to her as a "Prayer Warrior." It was Rhoda's habit to take the church directory and pray for every person on a weekly basis.

The first Sunday school classes were held March 1985 using the kitchen, hallway, and corners of the gym. We had four Sunday School classes that first Sunday.

It was the dream and desire of the North Kent Church to have our own building. We realized that we could not grow or provide the ministries that God was leading without our own building. Pastor Dick was able to find a ten-acre parcel on the corner of Courtland and Wolverine. A loan was secured from the Church of God General Conference to pay for this property. A Church of God Mission Builder appeal, generous contributions from people inside and outside of the North Kent Church, monthly payments, and Sacrifice Sunday paid off this debt before the current building was started.

I do not think I will ever forget the meeting that was held in a member's basement to discuss, pray and then vote to decide to build our current building. Three different plans were presented. Our current building was the most aggressive of the plans. It was also the only plan that made a provision for a baptistery. I cannot emphasize enough the step in faith that small group took to build our building. We had very little money but the faith that God would provide. The plan was to have De Witt Lumber of Blanchard rough in the building. An old-fashioned Church Raising would be held the fourth week of June in 1986 to get as much as possible done. Craftsmen, laborers, and other volunteer workers from all the churches in the United States would be invited to come and work on the building. This was the first time that this kind of project was attempted in the Church Of God. People from all over came, worked, donated their time, skills and materials, Materials were provided at cost. On the Sunday following the workweek, the first worship service was held in the shell of the North Kent Bible Church.

After the Church raising, there was still much to be done, drywall, doors, finish trim, insulation, etc. The members had work nights, Saturday workdays for months to work and finish the building. We received much help from the Michigan Churches who sent work crews to help. Without Pastor Eldred's experience building houses and his energy and the support of the many volunteers our building would not be here today. Praise God for his faithfulness! If anyone questions if God answers prayer, look around

you. We built a \$300,000 building for a little over \$120,000. The Church dedication was held on Sunday, August 2, 1987 prior to the General Conference held at Calvin College. Thanks to another Mission Builders Appeal, monthly payments, Rhoda's generosity, private donations, and sacrifice Sunday the debt on the building was paid off on December 7, 1994. Dick Eldred with his passion for evangelism left North Kent to teach and work with students at the Bible College in Oregon, Illinois and later helped build the Bible College in Atlanta, Georgia. North Kent Bible Church will be forever in his debt. Dick and Carol started many of the traditions that we still hold dear, during those early years.

Michael Gallagher was the second pastor to serve the North Kent Church. He started in October 1989 and served as pastor until July 1992. Michael grew up in the Troy, Ohio Church. He graduated from the Oregon Bible Church. He moved to California and worked as pastor and assistant pastor in the churches in California. Dale Bliss was the third pastor at North Kent. He was pastor from July 5, 1992 to November 8, 1998. Dale and his family had served as assistant pastor in the South Bend, Indiana church. In 1993 the church parsonage on the back of the ten-acre parcel was built.

In 1994, the church was contacted by Joyce Caverly to see if we would rent out our building during the week for use as a daycare. After much discussion and prayer it was decided to give Joyce permission to rent our building. During the spring of 1997, Joyce approached the church about purchasing the Daycare from her. Again, after much discussion and prayer it was decided to purchase the assets of the Daycare and have Michael Gallagher serve as Assistant Pastor/Daycare Director. Michael served in this capacity for about a year and then Kathy Tompson was hired to be the Daycare Director.

Michael Cisler is the fourth pastor of the North Kent Bible Church. He started in March of 1999. Michael left June 2019 to take a position at the Atlanta Bible College and General Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. Michael graduated from the Atlanta Bible College. He grew up in the Western Michigan area and was a member of the Southlawn Church. Before Michael and family came here, he served as Assistant Pastor in Ontario, Canada.

Josiah Cain is our current pastor starting in July 2019. Josiah was an intern at NKBC before taking over as pastor. Josiah is the son and grandson of Church of God Pastors. He grew up in South Carolina and moved with his family to Ohio. He is a graduate of the Atlanta Bible College.

A Pastor's cabinet made of appointed representatives to make business and financial decisions for the church runs our church. A Board of Elders who is responsible for the Spiritual Health and Spiritual Matters in the Church was added in 1995. The Congregation at the yearly Congregation Meeting in October approves both Elders and

Cabinet members. This model has served North Kent well and has been copied by many new churches that followed North Kent.

I have seen tremendous spiritual growth in the people God has sent to North Kent. Being involved and growing from that involvement has been a tremendous blessing to me. It is my hope and prayer that you are Blessed and growing in His Service.

Cheryl Norwood
December, 2023