

THE WINNEBAGO REFORMED CHURCH:

Through the efforts of two Winnebago men, the Reformed Church in America began to lay roots in eastern Nebraska. Adam Fisher came into contact with the Reformed Church while in Colony, Oklahoma. He came to the Mission there, seeking help to overcome an addiction. As he returned to his homelands to die, he carried the story of the Reformed Church's work among Native Americans, hoping the Reformed Church could establish a mission among his people. Some time later, Henry Roe Cloud, a student at Yale heard Mrs. Walter Roe speak. Afterwards, he approached Mrs. Roe seeking her help and the help of the Women's Board of Domestic Missions on behalf of his Winnebago people.

In the summer of 1906 those calls were heard and the Reformed Church took over the Winnebago Indian Mission from the Presbyterians. The Rev. and Mrs. Gustavus Watermulder, veteran missionaries to Native Americans, began to share the love of Jesus Christ to the people. In 1911 the Winnebago Reformed Church was established with 23 charter members. The Watermulder's gave of themselves for thirty some years until retiring in 1942.

Through the years, a central focus of the Church has been with the Winnebago children; First by providing opportunity for schooling. Later, in 1943 that work shifted toward "shelter care". Native American families began to collapse from the harsh realities of being a mistreated and despised people. Children suffered the most. Therefore, providing care to the children of broken homes became the guiding force of ministry. This work grew, eventually over running the mission facilities. In 1955, through the gifts of Reformed Church people, a beautiful Children's Home was erected and dedicated; a place where Christ's love and security could be offered to children of broken homes. The Home was blessed with many faithful workers; Bernice Tegelar, who continues to provide support and care to Winnebago children, Janet Huizenga, Andy & Marge Kamphius, Lloyd & Frieda Jurgens, Edward & Eleanor Van Gent, and Art & Ann Sieplinga.

In 1969 the Winnebago tribe took over the responsibility of providing care and shelter for their children through a tribal run Day Care Center and several Group Homes. However those efforts were derailed due to financial difficulties and the tribal run Day Care Center was closed in September of 1976. Once again the Winnebago Reformed Church responded to God's call to reach out to His precious children. In November of that same year, the consistory freed up part of

the Church to be used as a Day Care Center. The Center was licensed and opened with one child, but soon grew to care for 20 to 30 children. Still today, the Day Care Center strives to provide a place of quality care, allowing the parents to further their education or to be gainfully employed.

Within the Winnebago Reformed Church's rich heritage she has had the privilege of having two of her own tribal members serve as pastors. The Rev. James Ottipody served from 1938 - 1940 and 1942 - 1946. The Rev. and Mrs. Wilbur DeCora served two terms as well, 1956 - 1963 and 1970 - 1975. Mrs. Lupi DeCora is still a very active member in the life and ministry of this church, serving as an elder on consistory.

The road of service has not stopped within the walls of the church. The Winnebago Reformed Church has had and continues to have many of her members provide leadership positions within the greater Winnebago community; from tribal government positions to health care directors.

Other pastors who served in the life and ministry of the Winnebago Reformed Church:

The Rev. Gradus & Auriel Aalberts, 1942 - 1956, 1964 - 1969.

The Rev. Dirk & Jan Kramer, 1976 - 1978.

The Rev. Rodger & Janet DeYoung, 1960 - 1986..

The Rev. David & Nancy Crump, 1967 - 1994.

The Rev. Darrell & Dawn Dalman, 1994 –

It is the vision of the Winnebago Reformed Church to be a vibrant, community of believers; who strive to faithfully discern and walk the trail of our Triune God and to be a light within the community of Winnebago.

In an effort to fulfill part of her vision, the church has taken some solid steps to become increasingly, financially self-sufficient. The church is leading the way by taking the biggest "Partner in Mission share" for their pastor's support. They have also set up an endowment fund with the hope that one day it will help their grandchildren support a pastor on their own. These steps demonstrate that the Winnebago Reformed Church desires to be a mission outpost for their community and not just a mission for the Reformed Church in America.