

Many Are Called

Religious Life in Ypsilanti

COMPILED BY BILL NICKELS

Compiler's Note

From the founding of the City of Ypsilanti in 1823 to the present, Ypsilanti's churches have been a major part of our community. Ypsilanti's postal ZIP codes now include the addresses of 132 churches. Of those, more than forty are within city limits. Knowing we could not include all of them, following is a selection of churches that responded to a request for a brief description of their histories and activities. All images are from the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church, 718 North Prospect

In 1961, Reverend James Johnson revealed to his wife, Pearline, that God had given him a vision to begin a church to be called Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church. In 1962, Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church was organized and moved into their first church building at 948 Watling Boulevard.

From 1964 to 1968, Reverend Willie Moses served as pastor. In 1965, the church was incorporated in Lansing, Michigan. From 1968 to 1976, Reverend E. T. Thomas served as pastor. From 1976 to 1979, Reverend James Wilks served as pastor. Under his leadership, the membership grew to more than one hundred. From 1979 to 2017, Minister Garther Roberson, Jr., served as pastor. He retired after thirty-eight years of service. During his tenure, the church purchased new property and moved to its current location on 718 North Prospect Road with 234 members.

On August 20, 2018, Dr. Kevin Wade was called out of Texas to serve as pastor. Dr. and Mrs. Wade have created the Elijah and Elvira Projects. Both ministries will soon move to teach the standards of financial literacy, first aid and CPR, and self-defense, and will prepare those who would like to further their education in college or trade school.

Contributed by Pastor Dr. Kevin Wade



Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church, 2022

First Baptist Church of Ypsilanti, 1110 West Cross

The First Baptist Church of Ypsilanti (FBCY) was founded in 1836 and has been an active member of the community. From 1925 through 2016, the church was blessed with only four pastors: Reverend William R. Shaw (1925–64), Reverend William Bingham (1965–81), Reverend Vivan Martindale (1981–99), and Pastor Randy Johnson (2001–16). The years from 2016 to 2021 were a time of interim leadership and reflection. In 2021, FBCY called Pastor Tim Evans as their new pastor.

FBCY pastors and laity have been highly involved in many community and civic organizations. Reverend Bingham was instrumental in starting Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels, and the church continues to be the home of this organization. Currently, church members support and serve with YMOW, Habitat for Humanity, The Hope Clinic, SOS, Friends in Deed, Kiwanis, the Thrift Shop, and many other organizations. The church has also presented The Living Nativity for the community since 1976.

FBCY is currently home to many community organizations. These include Mosaic Church, Young Life, Daughters of the American Revolution, Jewish Family Services, Community Theater Groups, and others as space is requested.

FBCY desires to be a people who demonstrate their love for God by loving and serving their community.

Contributed by Pastor Tim Evans

St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, 411 Florence

The first Catholic place of worship in Ypsilanti was a wooden frame structure built in the 1840s on Ballard Street. By the 1850s, St. John's had outgrown this wood frame church, and a new brick church was constructed on an adjacent lot that was dedicated to St. John the Baptist in 1858. In 1862, an adjacent lot was purchased on Cross Street on which a rectory was built which remained in use until 1932.

The cornerstone for the present church was laid in 1932 on the corner of Cross and North Hamilton Streets. At the time, the parish of St. John numbered 360 families. It was during the early Depression, and St. John the Baptist Catholic Church may have been the only building of significance built in southern Michigan during that time period.

Shortly after the end of World War II, the size of St. John's congregation increased to more than one thousand families. Major efforts were undertaken to expand the parish's educational programs, including the construction of a new high school on Packard Road.

The latest major renovation involved the construction of a two-story gathering space (4,200 square feet on each floor) which linked the main church to the Activities Center (former school building) and made the entire facility interconnected and barrier-free.

In the last few years, the congregations of Transfiguration and Holy Trinity were merged with the St. John Parish, and current membership includes more than 800 families.

Father Dan Westerman is our current pastor.

Contributed by Pastor Dan Westerman

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 120 North Huron

In the last fifty years, St. Luke's has had only three rectors. Fr. Sidney Rood passed away in 1982 after nearly twenty-five years of service. He was followed by Fr. Jasper Pennington (1983–2000), the Rev. JoAnn Kennedy Slater (2006–22), and now, our interim rector, Rev. Beth Scriven.

The church has been active with the Ypsilanti area CROP Walk since it began in 1998, helping with dinners at Emanuel Lutheran Church (under the umbrella of Ypsilanti Hunger Coalition), and Hope Clinic. Other community activities include EMU food pantry support and Ypsi Youth Theatre.

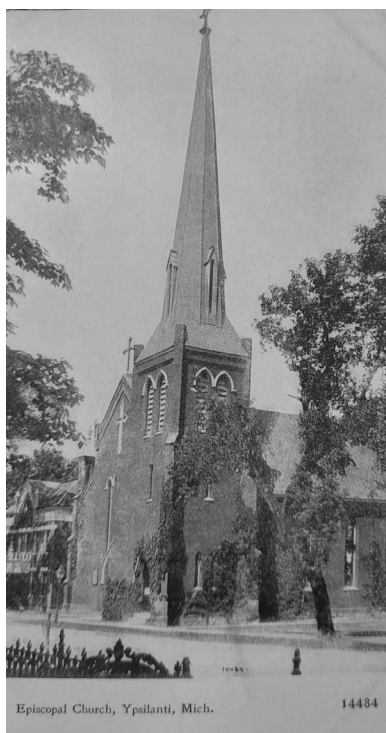
The Ypsilanti Heritage Festival gave us a chance to open our doors for guided tours and displays, plus several years of delightful high teas and Edwardian fashions and wedding gowns (courtesy of Grace Cornish). We also have been part of the First Friday musical events, several community organ-choir concerts, and the New Year's Eve Jubilees.

Music is an important aspect of the Sunday service. The three choir directors who served the longest are Alice Van Wambeke, Mary Ann Balduf, and Marijim Thoene.

In 1991, The "Good Shepherd" ceramic mural by Jane McAllister Dart was placed



St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, 2022



St. Luke's Episcopal Church, c. 1910

in the garth. In 2014, the Pease stained-glass window was lent to Eastern Michigan University for display at Pease Auditorium.

Contributed by Marcia McCrary

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 201 North River

Emmanuel Lutheran Church was formed in 1859 and has been a pillar of Ypsilanti for more than 162 years. Founded by German immigrants, Emmanuel has made God's love known beyond the walls of the church. For decades, Ypsilanti residents have benefitted from Emmanuel's diverse social ministries such as warm meals, the food pantry, free clothing giveaways, the annual Christmas Giveaway, and medical loan closet. Emmanuel continually works with other local non-profits such as SOS, Food Gatherers, and Hope Clinic to help eliminate food insecurity in the area. The church's leadership has partnered with Washt-

enaw County’s “Partners for Clean Streams” program, to design rain gardens and plant native flowers and grasses along church property that runs along the Huron River.

In 2023, Emmanuel celebrates its 100th anniversary in the current building, a large limestone structure on River Street, just down the road from Depot Town. The current pastor, Pastor Alex Clark, has served the congregation since 2018. If you are in Depot Town, stop on by!

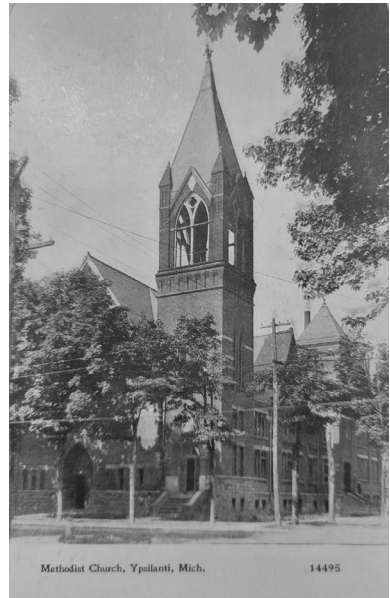
Contributed by Pastor Alex Clark

First United Methodist Church, 209 Washtenaw

Methodism was officially established in Ypsilanti when Rev. Elias Pattee organized a society, the precursor to a chartered church congregation, in May or June 1825. In the 1830s, the small congregation built its first chapel on River Street. In March 1843, during a revival service, the floor of the chapel collapsed, the wood stove fell over, and the building was lost to fire. Construction on a new church began immediately. The congregation grew and thrived on our current site until a larger church was needed.

The current sanctuary was consecrated and became the home of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Ypsilanti in 1892. The Akron style of architecture, popular in the late nineteenth century, was designed by Weary and Kramer and gave each person present a view of the pulpit and choir. The stained-glass windows that adorn the east, north, and south sides of the sanctuary still provide a colorful backdrop to those who choose to spend time in praise and prayer. We remain a congregation that welcomes everyone as God created them. We encourage openness in thought and expression as we profess the gift of grace that God offers to each of us.

Contributed by Pastor Dr. Donald Ferris-McCann



**First United Methodist Church,
c. 1910**

First Presbyterian Church, 300 North Washington

First Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti began as a Bible study group in 1825, was chartered with the State in 1829, and called its first pastor, the Rev. Ira Weed, in 1832. Today, that church maintains an active presence in the community with weekly worship, study, formation, local and global aid, and mission.

In recent years, the congregation began several active ministries. In 2008, the church partnered with Open Door Detroit and Westminster Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor to create the Riverside Community Meal, a hot, nutritious meal served around common tables every Wednesday to anyone in need. In 2009, with the refurbishment and expansion of the sanctuary pipe organ, the Ypsilanti Organ Festival was created. It sponsors three concerts a season, often partnering with the University of Michigan Organ Department and the Ann Arbor chapter of the American Guild of Organists. Performers are local students, national, and international artists.

Other community groups supported by the church include: the Boy Scouts of America, weekly recovery groups since 1948, Friends-In-Deed, the Hope Clinic, Meals-on-Wheels, and SOS Crises Housing. Local and global Christian ministries served include: UKirk Campus Ministry at EMU; along the U.S.-Mexican border in Douglas, AZ; Tokyo; and China.

Contributed by Rev. Keith Geiselman, Pastor