

**THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF OLEAN, NY**  
**1822-Present**  
**Celebrating 200 Years of Service**



**INSTALLED PASTORS AND TERMS**

1809 John Spencer: missionary, not pastor	1884-1889 John Burrows
1822-1824 William Stone	1889-1904 Newton L. Reed
1827-1829 John J. Hubbard	1904-1912 Louis F. Ruf
1836-1839 Reuben Willoughby	1912-1917 Harry Burton Boyd
1839-1840 Charles Hegguenburgh	1917-1919 Edgar Mason Smead
1840-1845 John J. Aiken	1920-1926 William Bishop Gates
1846-1847 Nathaniel H. Barnes	1926-1932 Arch H. Nicholson
1847-1848 John Lane	1933-1936 John R. Duffield
1849-1860 Sylvester Cowles	1938-1948 Whitney M. Trousdale
1860-1861 W. W. Taylor	1949-1951 Millard G. Roberts
1861-1862 A. D. Axrell	1952-1957 John Thomas Middaugh
1862-1867 J. D. Beaumont	1958-1970 Paul P. Hagen
1867-1868 G. R. Alden	1971-1978 John L. Kipp
1869-1874 N. M. Clute	1979-2006 Gary Larson
1874-1880 Henry M. Curtis	2009-2010 Eileen Borduin Vanderzwan
1880-1881 J. W. Simpson	2012-Present S. Bruce Levine
1881-1884 David Winters	

*This report was written by Lanna Waterman and Chris Norton based on the histories written for the 140<sup>th</sup> and 150<sup>th</sup>.*

## BEGINNINGS (1822-1830)

In 1803, Buffalo was an insignificant village and Rochester a small clearing in the wilderness. As farmers looked west, Major Adam Hoops, Olean's founder, saw the advantages of a "navigation headquarters at the headwaters of the Allegheny River." He acquired a 20,000-acre tract of the Holland Land Co. holdings and a year later Robert Hoops built the first log cabin in Olean and became his brother's resident land agent. Others lured by Revolutionary soldiers' reports of "a veritable Eden" followed.

At first, settlers conducted religious services in their homes or in taverns. Typically, services from more established churches back east were read with the occasional missionary or an itinerant preacher preaching. In 1809, Rev. John Spencer, a missionary ordained by the Northern Associated Presbytery and Connecticut Missionary Society, began his work in the area. He is credited with founding about 30 churches in the Holland Purchase (western New York), northern Pennsylvania and northeast Ohio areas. After "Father Spencer" had gathered the people together Josiah Tracy conducted a Sunday School, though in that day the Sunday School was a controversial innovation.

By 1820, Anson King, a young man of 34, had taken the lead in organizing the church. He wrote his former pastor, the Rev. Julius Steele of the Congregational Church of East Bloomfield, New Jersey, for advice. He received careful instructions and the recommendation: "If practicable, let the plan by all means be fully Presbyterian." This message, together with letters of dismissal for Mr. and Mrs. King, was delivered by the Rev. William Stone who probably was a relative of Mrs. King having the same name and coming from the same town in Connecticut.

For some time, the Rev. Stone preached in a barn east of the present site of the Valley Tire, and visited from home to home. On August 28, 1822, under his direction, the church was properly organized at a meeting held in the store of Hoyt Webb on the site now occupied by Bluebird Square. The original eight members were: Cornelius Brooks, John Boardman, Anson and Sophia King, Norman and Abigail Smith, Abijah and Bathsheba Warren. The Church was called the First Presbyterian Church of Olean and went under the care of the Presbytery of Bath. The members accepted "the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechism and Directory of aforesaid Church." The following is the Solemn Covenant:

*"We do now solemnly avouch the Lord Jehovah the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to be our God, professing a cordial reliance on His grace, through Jesus Christ for pardon and eternal life.*

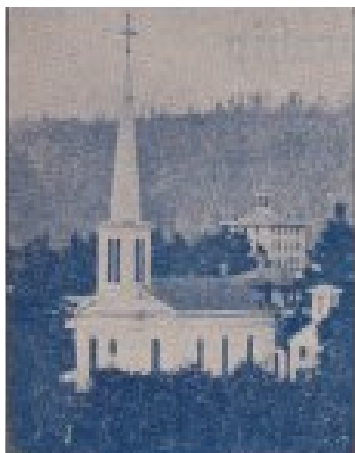
*Unreservedly devoting ourselves to His service and glory: Resolving, by the assistance of Divine Grace, that we will live in His fear, walk in His ways, and keep His commandments with our households. That we will forsake all our sins, turn to righteousness and cleave unto Christ as our only Savior.*

*Thus, in the sight of the all-seeing and heart-searching God, we solemnly bind ourselves to attend family, secret and public prayer: statedly to sanctify the Lord's Day and dedicate our children to God in Baptism."*

At this same meeting Anson King, Abijah C. Warren and Norman Smith were chosen as ruling elders. Norman Smith, who came from Elmira and was Olean's first physician, was designated as clerk. Mr. Stone continued as pastor for about two years and was succeeded by the Rev. John T. Hubbard who preached until 1829. When no minister was available, Deacon King read sermons and lead the music from Watt's Hymn Book and Dwight's version of the Psalms. In spite of so fine a start, the church did not grow strong enough to withstand the loss of its leading elders through removal from Olean, death, or withdrawal. In 1830 regular services were discontinued.

### **RESTORATION (1836-1841)**

In the early spring of 1836, Judge Quintus Flaminus Atkins, who had recently moved to Olean from Oberlin, Ohio, convinced the Rev. Sylvester Cowles to come to Olean to aid in the restoration of an organized church. On March 25<sup>th</sup>, after a prayer meeting held in the home of Judge Atkins, letters were presented by residents of Olean and Portville who formed a new church under the recently organized Presbytery of Angelica. Judge Atkins and Mr. Henry Dusenbury of Portville were elected elders. For about a year the services were conducted by the Reverend Ralph Willoughby at Judge Atkins' home or in the school house which stood where the Municipal Building parking lot is now located.



**ORIGINAL CHURCH BUILDING**

In 1837, the church purchased a lot including a wagon shop, east of the present church location, for \$200. Henry Dusnebury, J. G. Johnson and William Wheeler shared the cost. Erastus Platt and John Mulford oversaw the renovation of the wagon shop. A gallery for the choir was built at the front end and plane wooden benches were installed for seats. Beneath the floor the neighborhood chickens and their barnyard friends made themselves at home and often provided a interesting note to Sunday morning services. It was not uncommon for families to bring their lunch to church and in winter, to add foot and hand warmers. When a stove was installed Norman Birge wheeled wood over from Barry Street and tended the fire on Saturday evenings to warm the church for Sunday meeting. A year later, the first church bell in this region was hung in the little steeple and O. P. Boardman became the bell ringer.

The Rev. Charles Hequembourg followed Rev. Ralph Willoughby in 1839. He was considered to be a brilliant man but highly nervous and somewhat eccentric. Once while preaching, he was overcome by the heat from the stove pipe which passed directly over where he stood.

After six months, Hequembourg was succeeded by the Rev. John J. Aiken, a young man of 24, who demanded that several business men sign a bond insuring his support. He seems to have been a person "around whom storms raged." When the Reverend learned that the church law gave every member that right to vote and speak upon all church matters, he tried to have that right reserved for men only. After some heated discussion his motion was defeated.

As the church grew, it became necessary to incorporate so that the church could legally hold property or transact business. The society was incorporated December 9, 1841 – a day set apart by Governor Seward for Thanksgiving and prayer. The first Board of Trustees, Edwin M. Birge, Olcott P. Boardman, Henry Bryan, James G. Johnson and William F. Wheeler were chosen. The society was duly testified

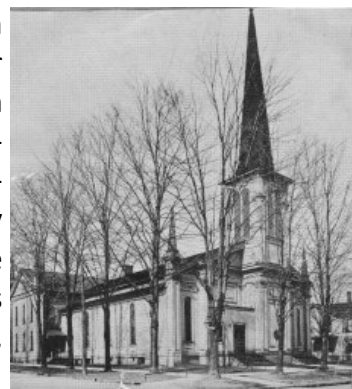
before Judge Fred S. Martin. The first important step taken was the purchase of real estate. A later land exchange with Dr. Charles S. Hurlburt, procured the present site of the church.

### REVIVAL AND GROWTH (1842-1870)

For four weeks during the summer of 1842 there came to Olean another man of great storms. The celebrated evangelist, the Rev. Samuel G. Orton, was a man of powerful prayer and deep piety. He aroused much interest and attracted large crowds in spite of muddy roads and no sidewalks. He didn't just preach in the church but also on the farms, in the shops, as well as the taverns and saloons. Many were converted when he thundered to the sinful, "You will be lost, Lost, LOST!"

Unfortunately, by 1847 only three male members remained (Norman Birge, O. P. Boardman and Caleb Smith) remained in the church. The church shared its pastor with the newly organized Portville and Alleghany churches. Both the Rev. Nathaniel K. Barnes and the Rev. John Lane, the church's next two ministers, remained but a year apiece perhaps because they were too depressed or too overworked.

In November 1849 the Rev. Sylvester Cowles of Ellicottville rescued the Olean Church again. This time he stayed on as pastor at an annual salary of \$500 (later \$600). Of this modest income \$100 was mission aid until 1856. Conditions began to improve. By 1856 the church was self-supporting and built a new church building (cost - \$6,000). Miss Wealthy Gleason proudly played the melodeon for services. Mrs. Samuel Bradley conducted the first primary department of the Sunday School. During this period, pews were rented to help pay Church expenses. The amount of pew rent varied according to the desirability of its location – needless to say the front pews were the cheapest. The following notice dated March 9, 1858, appears in the church records:



**CHURCH WAS REBUILT IN 1856.**

*Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church of Olean:*

*Take notice that I have this day transferred to H. S. Morris, all my right, title and interest to my pew, No. 60 in said Church, subject to a tax of \$10, now due for the bill.*

*Signed – Joseph Ditto*

In the year 1857 came the "Great Revival" at the second visit of the Rev. S. G. Orton whose dramatic preaching left a lasting impression.

In the year 1865 the women of the church were officially allowed to assist the church in fund raising for the first time. The church needed \$4,000 for extensive repairs and the purchase of an organ. The Rev. J. B. Beaumont preached the rededication sermon supported by Miss Frank Barse on the organ. Renovations and repairs continued with the manse being built (at a cost of \$3,300) in 1870; and again in 1887 the church was greatly enlarged and practically rebuilt for the sum of \$5,000.

The Rev. Beaumont was followed in the pulpit of Dr. G. R. Alden (1867–1868). His wife, Isabella MacDonald Alden, wrote about 100 popular books as well as Sunday school lessons under the pen name of "Pansy". According to Wikipedia: "Most of her works are didactic fiction with religious principles, which concentrate on translating Biblical precepts into acceptable Christian behavior in a modern world." Some of her books are currently available on Amazon.

## **DISCORD AND RESOLUTION (1870-1904)**

In the late 1870's the congregation experienced serious dissension. Church records detail church squabbles and several "trials" leading to the excommunication of members for adultery, drunkenness, foul language, and the breaking of the covenant (not attending services or communion). During this period, the church considered leaving Presbytery when asked to correct "irregularities" in the record. Pastor Cowles (former pastor of the church) intervened and somehow calmed the waters. In 1876, Revivalist Samuel Orton returned to the area for a 3<sup>rd</sup> time. On the morning of March 19, 1876, as the result of a third revival 62 persons were admitted into church membership upon confession of faith. No doubt these extra hands were useful since from October 20-23, 1878 this church hosted Synod.

With peace restored, many new communicants appeared from the pleasant neighborhood known as "Presbyterian Hill." At this time the Communion wine was served in large silver goblets which were passed by four devoted elders: Dr. C. H. Bartlett, H. D. Bennie, W. O. Curtiss and W. L. Pelton. These gentlemen always honored the occasion by wearing their frock coats and black ties.

Beginning in 1882 the church gradually developed a more formal program of social activity for its members. On March 25<sup>th</sup> of that year the Women's Missionary Society was started with Mrs. David Winters, the pastor's wife, as its first president. Monies raised were shared half with Home Missions and half with Foreign Missions. The Christian Endeavor society was formed about 1887 during the ministry of Rev. John Burrows. The original I. H. N. Circle of King's Daughters was a Presbyterian group organized by Mrs. Newton L. Reed, the wife of the pastor (1888-1904). One of the Circle's fund-raising events was a play called "Mrs. Whigs of the Cabbage Patch." A stage was erected in the dining room and provided great fun for both the audience and the cast. A fine pipe organ was installed in 1890 at the cost of \$3,500; and the lecture room, dining room and kitchen were done over and refurnished in 1902. Miss Anne Shaw taught the first Bible Class for Women in 1908 saw the inception of the Silver Cross Circle.

## **BUILDING (1904-1958)**



***CORNERSTONE OF THE BROWNSTONE CHURCH WAS LAID BY REV. LOUIS RUF  
ON 10/17/1912.***

By 1904, the twice enlarged church building was inadequate for congregational needs. Rev. Louis F. Ruf, the pastor at the time, began a new building fund by giving \$50 of his own money. The amount grew slowly until the Easter service in 1911 when a special offering of \$500 was taken up. Pledges and an anonymous gift added \$3,000 to the fund. Then, Mr. and Mrs. Frank L. Bartlett gave \$25,000 for the new church on condition that the congregation raise a like amount. A strenuous campaign was put on and by

the time Mr. Ruf resigned to accept another pastorate in Cleveland, the money had been subscribed. Building construction started during the summer of 1912 and on October 17, 1912. Mr. Ruf laid the cornerstone for the new church.

Although his first services in Olean were held in the YMCA, the Rev. Harvey Burton Boyd was the first pastor of the new brownstone church which was dedicated September 21-27, 1913. The congregation was most happy to be back in their own home again. Two new organizations joined the church program at this time: the Martha Class and the Deaconesses.

During WWI, the Rev. Edgar M. Smead occupied the pulpit. The church parlors were converted into a Red Cross work room which was directed by Mrs. Frank L. Bartlett and her assistant, Mrs. D. L. Jewell. Mrs. Bartlett contributed all the necessary supplies and in addition conducted a soup kitchen in the church basement for the needy.

The church celebrated its centennial with a 5-day celebration in October 1922 led by Rev. William Bishop Gates. Members of the church, former ministers and community guests contributed to its success. About twenty years after Rev. Gates had left Olean, he returned to present to the church a gift of the Gates Memorial Cathedral Chimes in memory of his wife, Mrs. Mary Leverett Gates. The chimes had a cheery sound and Mrs. Gates was described as a cheery person by members who knew her.

The once widely popular Men's Club, an interdenominational fellowship group, began in 1927 under the supervision of Rev. A. H. Nicholson. Rev. John R. Duffield became pastor in 1933. He had a special affinity for the youth of the church. After his death in 1938, the Duffield Summer Conference for Young People at Camp Duffield (currently Duffield Camp and Retreat Center) was set up a living memorial to him. In March 1938 the church observed the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its reorganization with sketches depicting scenes of long ago.

With the installation of the Rev. Whitney M. Trousdale on February 20, 1938, the life of the church entered a period of change. The tremendously disruptive effect of World War II on the whole society greatly increased the need for pastoral care – a burden Mr. Trousdale carried masterfully. Largely through his personal effort, the church kept in touch by monthly letters with 148 young men and women in active service. Seven of these young people gave their lives for their country. Mr. Trousdale also served as Camp Pastor through September 1943 at Camp Wheeler, Macon, GA and through July 1945 at Fort Benning, Columbus, GA. In 1940 Mrs. David Mace and her two small daughters came from London to stay with the Trousdales for the duration. They endeared themselves to the congregation and Mrs. Mace, a highly trained religious worker, occupied the pulpit during August 1941. Despite all the turmoil the church increased its benevolent responsibility. In particular, the Norris Bequest began with 5 shares of Telephone and Telegraph stock. This bequest continues to present day and benefits the church's Women's Association. A new manse at 221 North Fourth Street was purchased and remodeled. The remodeling of the chancel was financially raised but the work was deferred until after the war.

On June 5, 1949, Dr. Millard G. Roberts became the pastor. He believed that "In our Church in Olean lies our only hope for an answer to the problems in our country, in our families, and in in our personal lives." He had a dynamic personality and the youth program was greatly expanded including the addition of the Seventy-Eight Club and Young Adults. Attendance was so large that teenage Sunday School classes had to be held in the manse. The Women's Association was reorganized into the Circle system. The Board of Stewardesses, Benevolence, Religious Education and Music were incorporated into the church program. Church attendance increased, requiring double Sunday morning services. With the expanded youth program, Miss Joan McKinnon was hired as the full-time Director of Religious Education.

A new organ and chancel were dedicated on October 15, 1950. When Dr. Roberts left, Dr. Frank H. Ferris served as interim pastor from December 1951 to September 1952.

Dr. John T. Middaugh became the minister of First Church on September 28, 1952 and in his first sermon gave the theme of his ministry as follows: "Can I help? May I help? If I can, if I may, under God, I will." Under his guidance the church paid off a \$25,000 debt and in 1958, after a two-year Capital Funds Drive of \$225,000, a new heating system was installed and the building of the new education wing was completed. From 1953 until July 1955 Mrs. Frank V. Williams served as the Director of Religious Education. In September 1953 Mrs. Paul C. (Mabel) Barbour took up her post as church secretary. She faithfully served the church for many years providing support for both pastors and the congregation. In 1956, Rev. John W. Thomson replaced the Rev. Sheridan Robbins as associate minister, adding new strength, particularly to the youth programs of the church. Dr. John not only took an active part in broadening the church life in the local community but also held various positions of responsibility in the Buffalo-Niagara Presbytery and the Synod of New York. The summer of 1954 saw the Olean Presbyterian Church projected into World Christianity in a new way when Dr. Middaugh became a Summer Director of the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches at Geneva, Switzerland.

1957 proved to be a year of both accomplishment and change. Ground-breaking ceremonies for the new educational building took place on July 31<sup>st</sup> and the cornerstone was laid on September 29<sup>th</sup> with Dr. Louis Ruf presiding as he had with the brownstone church building in 1912. In October Dr. Middaugh left Olean to take up his new pastorate at Brown Memorial Church in Baltimore, MD. He had "helped" greatly.

From October 1957 until the following April Jack Thomson with some assistance from Dr. Frank Ferris who was welcomed back, carried the load of leadership and spiritual direction. There was a steady increase in church attendance and the church moved forward with a greater awareness of its responsibilities.



**09/29/1957: LAYING OF CORNERSTONE FOR  
EDUCATION BUILDING, DR. LOUIS RUF PRESIDING**

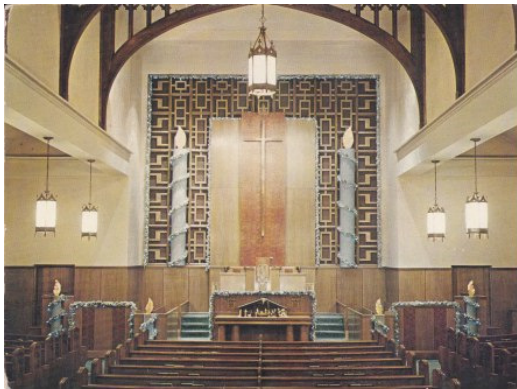
On April 13, 1958 the Rev. Paul P. Hagen began his ministry at First Church. Soon after his assistant minister the Rev. Edward D. Peachey joined the church staff. The new educational building was in the final stages of its construction and Dr. Hagen immediately undertook to tie up the loose ends and get the church resettled in preparation for the dedication ceremony which took place September 14<sup>th</sup>. Both Dr. Louis F. Ruf and Dr. John T. Middaugh participated in the dedication. In June of 1960 the Rev. A. David Bos replaced Ned Peachey as assistant minister, and was installed as the first Associate Pastor of the church March 25, 1962.

### **CHANGING TIMES (1960-1977)**

After World War II churches experienced an upward surge in church attendance and church membership, which carried over into the 60's. The Olean church felt the benefit of that movement. Membership rose noticeably and church financial support, locally and for missions, greatly increased. The peak apparently was reached in the middle 60's. During this period church membership was over 900 and income rose to \$99,000 in 1964. Missions outside the church also increased, placing Olean First Presby-

terian Church among the top fifty churches of comparable size. During this period, the “Deck the Hall” tradition to open the Advent season began. A tureen dinner brought together members and their families, followed by the adults decorating the church auditorium and the children decorating their Sunday School rooms.

However, as we know, 1960s brought significant changes in the nation, the people, and the churches. The Civil Rights Movement, the Cold War, the Viet Nam War, the Women’s Movement, the Space Race, and the Counterculture presented new challenges to the church including declining church attendance and membership. The population in Olean also began declined during this period from a peak of about 23,000 in the mid-1950’s to the present-day population of a little under 14,000.



**THE CHURCH DECORATED FOR CHRISTMAS  
CIRCA 1960.**

In keeping with the modern trend, women took a more active leadership roles in church as Elders, Deacons and ministers. The Women’s Organization, divided into various circles with their special duties, Stewardship, Friendship, Outreach, Loyalty, and Nursey Mothers, gave dedicated service to the church. The very successful bazaars held each November were replaced in the late 1960’s with a “Sharing Fair” which included a luncheon with gifts, baked goods and candy collected and sent to patients at Gowanda State Hospital, migrant workers in the area, the Youth Camp at Great Valley, and Davidson, TN (where youth of the church several mission trips). Craft articles were earmarked specifically for the Indians at the Presbyterian Center in Albuquerque, NM.

Youth fellowship attendance increased in 1963 and the choir membership rose to an all-time high under the fine leadership of Fred Crumley, organist and choir director. Fred continued to give us the highest type of church music with special presentations at Christmas and at the Easter season until September of 1979. The church began ushering in the summer season with the Festival of Flowers and Music during the pastorate of Dr. John Middaugh. In the 1980’s, the flowers part was dropped but a Festival of Music continues to this day. The organ was added to with the gift of the memory of Mrs. Maude H. Thomas. It was dedicated in February at the special services and recital by Fred Crumley.

During the summer of 1963, members of the congregation and Dr. Hagen traveled to the Holy Land, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Israel and Greece with a day in Rome, Italy. The group leader was Dr. H. N. Richardson, professor of the Old Testament at Brown University School of Theology.

A “Sunday Evening Fellowship” began in October 1963 with a box supper followed by study groups. Also, on October 5, 1963, James Edgar, nephew of Miss Grace Humphrey, became the first minister from the Olean church to be ordained as a Presbyterian minister. Since that time, 12 other men and women from or associated with the church have gone into the ministry.

An event of note in March 1965 was the honoring of Miss Grace Humphrey for her 75 years of membership and service. She joined the church on March 2, 1890 was a devoted and active member for decades. In the receiving line at her reception were members of 50 more years.

At the 1964 annual meeting the congregation began a "Capital Fund Campaign" dedicated to needed repairs and capital improvements of the church building and paying off several mortgages and financial commitments that church had made. The goal was \$60,000; \$83,586 was pledged. As a result of this fine response, the basement of the old building was remodeled, much needed repairs to the church building proper were completed as well as the meeting of all financial obligations. Much of the work was done by Dr. Hagen, members of the church and many of the Senior High young people.

In August 1964 David Bos, Associate Minister, left for a ten-month study on a Fulbright scholarship at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands. During his stay in Europe, he met Ana Van Wijk and on June 9, 1966 they were married in the Netherlands. They returned to Olean to continue work with the youth of our congregation. In April 1967 David accepted the call of the Presbytery of Long Island to develop a ministry in the new area development of Smithtown. Rev. Edwin Martin became Assistant Minister on June 1 and continued the work of the Christian Education Department. He accepted a call to be the pastor of the church in Glens Falls and he and Katherine left our church May 1, 1970.

Also in 1964, the Indians of the Seneca Reservation were relocated when the Kinzua Dam was built, taking much of their land, and a new church was needed. Dr. Hagen designed a church for Jimerson-town and with the help of many men of the Olean congregation and the young people, a modern new church was completed. To this day, we support the Jimersontown church and for which they express their gratitude.

Through the efforts of Dr. Hagen and after two years of wearying contacts with government authorities, Nisan and Toris David of Lebanon and their three children displaced in the Six Day War, were brought to Olean where church members secured worked for Mr. David and housing for the family. The church rallied around the family helping them feel at home and adapt to the American way of life. During their year in Olean, they had another child and then moved to Chicago where Mrs. David had relatives.

Missions are often thought of as sending money to some foreign land. But in September 1968 our own, Dr. and Mrs. William Goodlett left for the mission field in India. For a year they worked in the 165-bed mission hospital and its several out-patient clinics in Fatehgarh. William as a surgeon and Audrey as a nurse. While there, they served under the commission of Ecumenical Mission and Relations of the church and provided their own transportation to and from the field. In the US, several of the church's Senior High youth spent their Easter vacations of 1966, 1967 and 1968 in Davidson, TN, rebuilding and repairing the church and other buildings in that small village and working in the Harlem section of New York City. In the late 60s, the church sold the manse on N 4th Street and bought a new one at 527 York Street.

Dr. Hagen decided to leave the Olean church to accept a position as Manager of Memorial Homes Community at Penny Farms, Florida in July 26, 1970. The church hired Dr. Paul Warren, retired pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, MD as interim pastor. He served the church from October 1970 to April 28, 1971.

Dr. John Kipp accepted our call on April 28, 1971. Under his leadership, the church recognized the constitution of UPCUSA and its amended bylaws. Also, in 1971, the Roberts' Fund started with a bequest in the will of Mrs. Margaret L. Roberts. Its intent was "to be used to provided care and comfort for per-

sons over 65 years of age in need of financial assistance without regard to faith. The fund provides financial gifts on a quarterly basis to Home Care & Hospice, Interfaith Caregivers, the Linwood Center and the Senior Center at the John J. Ash Community Center. In 1973, Olean Child Development Center (OCDC) opened its doors. The church and OCDC enjoyed a mutually beneficial for 43 years until OCDC closed in November of 2016.

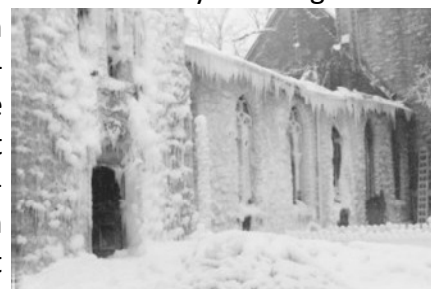
During the June 1972 flood, work of the mission field was evident in the response of the congregation in helping flood victims. Financial aid was given where needed. Crews of adults and young people, using the manse as headquarters, went out each day for weeks to aid in cleaning up the terrible mess left by the flood waters. It was the commandment, "love thy neighbor" in action.

### **REBUILDING AFTER A FIRE (1978-present)**



**02/04/1978: THE CHURCH  
BURNED, 6 DAYS AFTER PASTOR**

On January 29, 1978, Dr. Kipp announced he was leaving the Olean church and on the evening of February 4, 1978, the church burned. It was a bitter cold evening and the next day, the remains were covered in ice. Members of the church crawled in through the office window during the fire and were able to remove some of the historical records of the church. By morning the sanctuary was a shell and the annex section was destroyed. The Christian Education building had some water and smoke damage. The cause was suspected to be electrical. The next morning the local Episcopalian Church, St. Stephen's Church, invited us to worship with them. After that the church met in the gym at the YMCA and eventually moved into the gym/dining room area of the Christian Education Building where we worshipped until Easter 1981 when the new sanctuary was ready.



**ICE ENGULFED THE CHURCH AFTER  
THE FIRE.**



**CHURCH MEMBERS PREPARE FOR EASTER SUNDAY, 1981-  
THE FIRST SUNDAY IN THE NEW SANCTUARY**

During that time, Rev. Gary Larson was called to be our pastor and he began on March 15, 1979. He came to a gutted building. The repaired church was dedicated on October 4, 1981. One of the major purchases was the Moeller Organ with its 45 ranks of pipes is considered one of the finest in the area. Another point of interest and pride for the church are the stained-glass windows. The 9 main windows depict the 6 days of creation (on the west wall) and the coming of Christ, His Passion and His Resurrection featuring black glass (on the east wall). The rear windows transition from Old to New Testaments as well as incorporating windows from the church before and after the fire. In September of 1979, Fred Crumley left his post as Minister of Music. In 1980, David Spangler took up the post.

Over the next 27 years, the church experienced a "rebirth", rising from the ashes. A "numbers man", Rev. Larson noted that during his tenure he performed 139 wedding ceremonies, 305 funerals, 204 in-

fant baptisms and 29 adult baptisms. The church sent 600 children to Camp Duffield Summer Camp and generated revenues of \$4.5 million dollars. The church was strong in mission giving and gave approximately \$900,000 to Mission Giving. During his tenure, the York Street manse was sold so that Rev. Larson and future pastors could purchase their own homes.

The church has been involved with 13 men and women going into the ministry since 1960. They have had mission trips to Kane, PA after a tornado and to Juarez, Mexico. In 1984, Gary Larson and Jack Searles wrote a grant to start Interfaith Caregivers Organization in Olean, and church member Joan Wells became the first direction. Currently, the organization is housed in the church. In 1985 and 1986 respectively, both the Gibson Scholarship and Johnson Scholarship were established. The college journey of multiple youth from the church have benefitted from these scholarships. Presbyterian Women have given to many needed causes. Mission has been an ongoing good.

In 1994, the will of Dr. Rudy Burt and his wife, Margaret, left a \$100,000 endowment to the church and the rest of their estate (about \$1.6 million) to establish the Burt Fund with the church as the Fund's trustees. Using about 5% of the total fund each year the Burt Fund benefits the youth and/or the elderly of the greater Olean area. Since 1997, the Burt Fund has disbursed more than \$3,000,000.

1995 brought the resignation of David Spangler as Minister of Music and Rick Snyder was hired as his replacement. That same year, 7 youth from the church attended the Presbyterian Youth Triennium at Purdue University. A year before (1994) 12 people (9 youths, 3 adults) went a PUMA (Presbyterian United Missionary Alliance) mission to Juarez, Mexico. Also, Rev. Larson took a Sabbatical and Stephanie Davis filled the pulpit as Supply Minister for the summer. Later that year, the elevator was installed in the Education Building. The following year, the Chapel was restored and rededicated.

In 2001, after 9/11, the church hosted the first Interfaith Discussion Group, inviting speakers from the Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths to dialogue. The group was expanded and continues to this day. In the early 90s the church started hosting the annual Martin Luther King Service, led by the local Baha'i group and others. The church has been actively involved with the community with members involved in a variety of charities. Also, in 2001, the Nye Scholarship was established, giving the church 3 scholarships available to youth entering college. In 2002, Rev. Larson took a second Sabbatical and Pam Wat was the Supply Minister.

Rev. Larson retired in on May 31, 2006 making him the longest serving (27 years) pastor in the church's history. Evon McJunkin was named interim pastor for a year. On April 26, 2009, the church called Rev. Eileen Bourduin Vanderzwan. She served for a year and Rev. Dan McKee and Dr. Tony Evans served as Temporary Pastor and Pulpit Supply Pastor respectively until in August 2012, Rev. Dr. S. Bruce Levine became the designated pastor. He was installed as permanent pastor on August 3, 2014. He is still the pastor today. In 2022, Betsy Cashing, longtime member of the church, became Moderator for the Presbytery of Western New York.

As has happened with many mainline churches, attendance has dropped over the past few years. But when we did not need as much space, we continued to try to help our community by renting space to such organizations as the Interfaith Caregivers, the United Way, the County Mental Health, as well as storage areas for the libraries of the Southern Tier Symphony and Keynote Chorus.

The church will be celebrating its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday on September 18 at 4PM. All are welcome to attend.