

# First CRC Chronology

Compiled by Jack Bol and Shirley Van Heukelem

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**Excerpt:** First CRC has a richly blessed history, through good times and difficult times. We are grateful for God's merciful guidance through the 100+ years we have been a church in south Denver.

## 1906

Father and Founder of First CRC, Mr. Klaas Van Wyk, led worship services in his home for people of Dutch extraction who came to Denver for health reasons.

## 1907

Rented a meeting place in a hall at S. Broadway and Colorado Ave. at \$7 month.

This group organized as a congregation by home missionary Rev. Botbyl of Classis Iowa (now Classis Pella) with 23 members in full and 30 baptized members (nine families and seven individuals).

Purchased lots at southeast corner of S. Emerson St. and Colorado Ave., 100 x 112 feet, for the sum of \$675. These lots are now identified as 1804 (parsonage) and 1814 S. Emerson St. (church). Decision reached to build a church building at this location, starting with a fund of \$1400.

"The members of the church were scattered all over Denver. The majority was living in North Denver (Berkeley), while some had their homes near the center of town, and others in Englewood.... On Saturday afternoon, July 20, practically the entire congregation, the stronger on foot, and weaker ones in buggies, set out to find lots. After surveying several places... the corner of Colorado and Emerson was chosen. It was deemed advisable to close the deal immediately. Two members each loaned the Church three hundred dollars and the lots on which Church and parsonage stand were bought for six hundred and seventy-five dollars". I. van Dellen, 40th Anniversary booklet, 1947

First CRC called Rev. Idzerd van Dellen to be first pastor; he spent one-quarter of his time as minister and three-quarters of his time as home missionary. First Church paid one-quarter of his salary: \$275 per year.

*"On December 22, 1907, I was installed by Rev. J. N. Trompen as Minister of Denver and home missionary of Classis Pella..... At the fall meeting of Classis Pella, the newly organized Church of Denver became the calling Church for the Home Missions of Classis. The entire West from the Rockies to the Pacific and from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico was its field. Denver promised to pay one-fourth of the salary and receive one-fourth of his services". Rev. Idzerd van Dellen*

### **1908**

Dedicated the first church building and used until 1917 when it was raised and a new one built on the current site.

"On June 7, 2008, we dedicated our church building, and in the late fall of that year we could move into the newly built parsonage next to the church. We lived on the outskirts of the City. East of us were wide open spaces. The meadow larks delighted us with their song. There were no sidewalks in evidence. We still used oil lamps in the church and parsonage. Autos were practically unknown, at least in our circles. Those who lived at a distance came by streetcar or with horse and buggy. As late as 1909, horse stables were built behind the church, and still later hitching posts were placed on the property".

Rev. Idzerd van Dellen

The Consistory organized the Christian School Society, which eventually became Denver Christian Schools.

### **1909**

The Consistory organized the Bethesda Sanatorium for the treatment of TB patients. The facility at 4400 E. Iliff was opened later.

### **1911**

Organized the Zang Vereening (Choral Society), but only on the condition that they sing Dutch psalms half the time.

The Church instituted the use of individual cups at communion services. This was done, most likely, in response to the number of individuals with tuberculosis and the desire not to spread the disease.

### **1912**

The janitor was reappointed for the sum of \$12 a month.

### **1913**

Rev. W. De Groot, from Holland, MI, accepts call of First CRC as a missionary to the Mormons at Ogden, UT.

Bethesda Sanitarium opened its doors at the facility located on 4400 E. Iliff Ave. for treatment of tuberculosis patients.

#### **1914**

The Consistory decided to use the American language in catechism classes. Prior to this only the Dutch language was used.

#### **1915**

Decision was made to rent building near Robinson's Lumber Company for a mission Sunday School.

*"In 1915 we worked in three communities, namely, Manchester, near the old cotton mills; south from Robinson's lumber yard; and on Evans near South Broadway. Later meetings were also held at the home of C. Voss on Morrison Road". Rev. Idzerd van Dellen*

#### **1916**

The worship services transitioned to two Dutch services and one English service each Sunday.

Congregation commits to construct a new church building since the original building was too small. While the Church was under construction the congregation met on Sundays in Alkire's Hall, Iowa and South Pearl, while the Cameron Methodist Church provided a room for meetings during the week.

*"Because the congregation with its many sick and poor was not able to contribute much for the new church I was sent to various congregations to raise funds... Usually I preached a sermon and gave a brief talk about our needs afterwards.... In twelve weeks I collected 12,000 dollars which in those days was a big sum". Rev. Idzerd van Dellen*

#### **1917**

Dedicated the new church building in November. The organ for the sanctuary cost \$800.

Opened Denver Christian School at Florida and Clarkson.

#### **1918**

Spanish Influenza spread throughout the United States including Denver.

*"The epidemic was so serious that schools were closed, and people were prohibited from meeting in their places of worship. One Sunday we therefore met in the open air near Church. On another Lord's Day we were permitted to gather in the Church but everyone had to wear a mask to prevent the spreading of contagion". Rev. Idzerd van Dellen*

### 1921

The congregation purchased a new Buick Model 22-35 from the Norton Buick Auto Co., 25 Colfax Ave. for Rev. van Dellen's use. The total price was \$1110.75.

*"While the congregation was steadily growing I needed an auto so that I might move faster and cover more territory. I could not very well afford to buy and keep a car. My salary was not very large, and we always needed a maid because my wife remained frail and weak. The congregation, considering this, presented me with a Buick. Now I had to learn to drive. I was fifty years of age and had never handled any machinery. We almost despaired whether I would succeed in engineering the big wagon. But two brethren instructed me, and I made it".* Rev. Idzerd van Dellen

A member of the congregation stood guard over the cars parked near the church during Sunday evening services. No reasons given for this activity but may well have been to protect the pastor's new automobile.

### 1924

Installed Rev. D. D. Bonnema as Associate Pastor to aid Rev. van Dellen. Purchased a second parsonage (no street address given) which was later given to Second CRC when it organized.

"The consistory in its majority, after having studied the problem, decided to propose to the congregation to call a second minister. Many objected to this. Some ridiculed it. They said it would not do to have two captains on one ship..... Delegates of Classis were called in to strengthen the hands of the consistory.... Finally it was decided to ask a candidate to help temporarily". Rev. Idzerd van Dellen

### 1925

Purchased Wicks Pipe Organ for \$3,400 from company in Illinois.

### 1927

Organized the South Clayton Chapel, an evangelism outreach to the neighborhood just east of First CRC. This is one of the church's early efforts in local missions.

### 1928

Established the church library.

### 1931

The church's budget was \$12,870.12, the number of families was 194 and total membership was 917. Even during the Great Depression the deficit for the previous year was only \$200.

In the past years the budget was based on weekly contributions of 62 cents per member. In view of so much unemployment and reduced earnings the consistory deems it advisable to

discontinue this policy, and leave it to the individual members to give as they are able. First CRC Financial Report - 1931

### 1936

Organized the Second CRC when the number of members became too many for the First Church building. Located on the other end of the block (Ogden & Jewell) from First CRC it may be the only location in the denomination with two churches on the same block.

### 1940

Rev. van Dellen preached his farewell sermon at Denver's South High School auditorium.

*"My pastorate in Denver came to an end... I served the Denver Church for thirty-three years, and had been in the active ministry forty-five years".* Rev. Idzerd van Dellen

### 1943

Dr. George Postma, a member of First CRC, bought a new organ for the church. It was dedicated on December 10 with Mr. Reynolds, the Denver city organist, at the keyboard. This organ is still in use for Sunday worship services.

### 1941-1945

Eighty-four men from First CRC served with the US armed forces during WWII. Two First CRC members, Don Dykema and John Vander Hyde, gave their lives in this service.

Because of the multiple military bases in and around metro Denver, First CRC opened its doors, homes and hearts to many military personnel during the duration of the war.

### 1951

Organized Third CRC, at 2400 S. Ash St., in the neighborhood of Bethesda Sanatorium.

### 1956

Remodeling addition of First CRC completed at a cost of \$106,681. Added classrooms and an enlarged sanctuary on the east side of the building.

### 1957

First Church celebrated its 50th Anniversary. Rev. Erffmeyer was serving his last year as pastor of the church.

Sunday menu at the manse was rump roast. Reserved seating for the Erffmeyer family was third row from the back, north side, middle section. Rev. Erffmeyer was always "deftig" – black suits for preaching, tails for the Lord's supper. Martha Zoetewey letter to Erffmeyer, 1998.

### **1958**

Worked with Second and Third Christian Reformed Churches to organize The Rocky Mountain Diaconal Committee so that they could accomplish more by working together. Early minutes show that two areas of interest were collecting information on planning a home for the aged and support for the Christian School. This early group was instrumental in organizing a planning committee for this home for the aged. They were involved in organizing and spinning off the early board for University Hills Christian Nursing Home.

Names of First CRC members who served on the Rocky Mountain Diaconal Committee in those early years of 1958 -1961 were Seymour Alsum, J. Zoetewey, John Donk, L. Zuiderveen, A. Schemper, B. Folkerts, and G. Hageman. Many more followed.

### **Late 1950s through mid-1970s**

Many men from First CRC served in the Korean and Vietnam wars. On Nov. 16, 1969, at the height of the Vietnam War, First CRC member PFC Daryl Rupke was killed in action.

### **1961**

Helped in the organization of Fairview CRC in the north Denver metro area. This congregation eventually transitioned to Family of Christ Community Church in Westminster.

### **1962**

Hillcrest CRC, 3000 S. Race St., was organized in the Denver area south of Yale Ave. and just west of University Blvd. – this was primarily a 2ndCRC venture, although some First CRC members joined this new congregation

Established the Denver-Christian Indian Center at 501 S. Pearl St. The Indians had been worshipping with the First CRC congregation prior to this time.

### **Mid 1960's**

Participated with other area Christian Reformed Churches in the organization of the Rocky Mountain Christian Conference Grounds. Mountain property was purchased by the Rocky Mountain Classis youth groups to be used as a retreat center.

### **1967**

Helped in the establishment of Ridgeview CRC, in the southern suburb of Littleton. The 2nd & 3rd generation Dutch Americans vacated the "Dutch ghetto" around First and Second Churches for more affordable housing in the suburbs. This church plant in Littleton had a solid base of reformed Christians. This congregation eventually transitioned to Horizon Community Church in Highlands Ranch.

### **1973**

The Wednesday Family Night program was instituted to allow families to come to church one night each week for youth (Cadets & Calvinettes) and adult classes. Volunteer teams served dinner prior to the classes.

### **1975**

Because of a difference in philosophy that arose out "Key 73" (an evangelical push by the CRC to grow the denomination to 400,000 by the year 2000) a group of members and the pastor, Rev. Jack Vander Laan, left First CRC to form New Life Church. "Key 73" promoted many changes and new ideas; some members were uncomfortable with the changes while others wanted to move even faster.

### **1976-1987**

Rev. Jerrien Gunnink led First CRC through a healing process after the 1975 split.

### **1977**

Volunteers organized a media center for all church ministries to use.

### **1983**

Helped in the organization of Eastern Hills Community Church in the eastern suburb of Aurora.

### **1985**

Opened an office on the 3rd floor to house the Denver Diaconal Conference (DDC) full time staff. DDC operated out of that until the end of 1998 when they moved the offices to the Ministry Center at 9185 E. Kenyon, Denver.

### **1987**

Under the direction of Pastor John Van Regenmorter and Youth Pastor Kevin Byker, First CRC sent out its first Project Serve Team.

### **1992**

Elected first woman (Jeanne Hageman) to serve as deacon.

### **1998**

Members of First CRC were instrumental in purchasing and promoting the Ministry Center at 9185 E. Kenyon Ave. in Denver. The purpose of this Center was to provide affordable office space for parachurch organizations related to the Christian Reformed Churches in the Denver area.

### 1998/99

Installed an elevator on the south side of church, member mailboxes in the foyer, and a partition between the sanctuary and the foyer, removed 3 rows of pews in the back, and enlarged the foyer for a cost of \$106,208.

### 2000

Participated in the denominational Refocusing program. The following Mission Statement was one of several results from this refocusing effort:

*First Christian Reformed Church of Denver is striving to worship God with reverence and exuberance, build up believers, and reach out to those who need Christ.*

### 2001

First CRC purchased 1826 S. Emerson St. house, affectionately known as the Emerson House, for \$180,000. A task force determined that the house should be used for transitional housing until a more urgent need necessitated usage change.

### 2001/2002

Remodeled the church sanctuary and foyer for a cost of \$275,158.45. The pews were removed and sent to Pennsylvania for refinishing, the color scheme was changed, and new carpet installed, all to give the interior a long-overdue "facelift". During the three months of this remodel the congregation worshiped at Second CRC.

### 2003

In March a historic storm dumped 3 feet of snow on Denver. The weight of the snow cracked a beam in the sanctuary and the congregation was again forced out of the building for 5 months to worship at Second CRC.

Working from one of the directives of the 2000 Refocusing results, a Staff Restructuring task force was formed to evaluate the current staff positions. This resulted in a paid staff paradigm shift that included a Minister of the Word, a Minister of Church Development, an Outreach Coordinator and a Worship Coordinator.

### 2004

Hired Joy Engelsman as the Minister of Church Development. After receiving her MDiv from Denver Theological Seminary in 2004 and coming to work at First CRC, Pastor Engelsman finished the required seminary training from Calvin Theological Seminary in 2007. She was examined at the fall 2007 Classis Rocky Mountain meeting and ordained at First CRC on October 7, 2007. This made her the first ordained female pastor at First CRC.

Participated in the Lily Endowment Fund's Worship Grant Program, focusing on Intergenerational Worship.

Council approved women to serve as elders.

### **2005-2007**

Remodeled the 2nd floor staff offices, the basement bathrooms, and the parsonage as well as replaced the original, 100-year-old boiler. The parsonage had not had a pastor live in it since 1997 and was in need of major upgrades. Total cost for all of above: \$165,600. Volunteers helped to keep the expenses down.

### **2006**

Council called Joel Schreurs to fill the vacant position of Minister of the Word. Pastor Schreurs accepted the call, came to First CRC after completing his MDiv program at Calvin Theological Seminary in May, was examined at the fall Classis Rocky Mountain meeting and ordained on October 8. This made him the first Minister of the Word to be ordained at First CRC fresh out of seminary.

The Sunday School curriculum for grades 3-8 changed from the traditional format to a more interactive learning experience called Magnify and Focus. This curriculum was developed internally as the classes progressed through the year.

### **2007**

First CRC celebrated its 100th anniversary with the following highlights:

April 13 – Dr. Tom Noel history presentation: "A Century of Change in Old South Denver"

September 15 – Cultural Heritage and Congregation/Neighborhood party.

September 19 – Dr. Richard Post presentation: "History of Denver Christian Schools"

November 1-4 - Mystery History social coffees/dinners

In conjunction with the CRC's denominational 150th anniversary Pastor Joel preached on Remembering (April 22) and Pastor Joy preached on Rejoicing (August 26) and Rededicating (December 30).

### **2011-2012**

In the fall of 2011, Pastor Joel began a series entitled god's Peculiar People. This series walked through the Old Testament, one book each week. In order to involve as many people as possible in this journey, First CRC set aside the traditional age-specific Sunday School hour in order to offer an intergenerational education hour, called Story Groups. First graders

through people in their 80s attended Story Groups. There were eight Story Groups, formed from the eight existing elder/deacon households, meeting throughout the church properties. Each lesson expanded on the book of the Old Testament that Pastor Joel was preaching from that week. God's Peculiar Story sermon series and Story Groups were in place from September 2011 through May 2012.

First CRC applied for and received a grant from the Lilly Endowment 2011 National Clergy Renewal Program. This grant financed a 2012 three-month sabbatical for Rev. Joy Engelsman and her 2 daughters centered around their own faith formations through the lens of the geographical places that shaped them, China, Africa, and The Netherlands. They also planned to experience together how communities in other cultures acknowledge the faith formation of their members. The Engelsman family took their sabbatical February through April 2012.

**2013/2014**

In 2013 a task force was formed to determine the staffing needs of First CRC after the departure of our Minister of Church Development. In 2014 the task force recommended that the church hire a part time Director of Faith Formation, someone who would help members at all stages of spiritual development grow in their walk with Jesus.

An \$85,000 fund-raising event to build a ministry garage behind the Emerson House was successful and construction of the garage was completed in August 2013.

Rev. Joel Schreurs and his family took a three month sabbatical May through July 2013 which involved trips to Nicaragua and California. At the end of his sabbatical Pastor Joel participated in the Sea-to-Sea bike ride that raised money to help alleviate poverty through several Christian agencies. He rode from Los Angeles, CA to Colorado Springs, CO. The foci of his trips included intentional family time, the shadowing of missionaries, focused reading, and the bike ride.

Story Groups was re-kindled again after a year of age-specific Sunday School. Story Groups was offered during Advent and Lent.

**2014/2015**

First CRC hired Kim Csepe for the new position of Director of Faith Formation on September 1, 2014.

The 2014/15 educational year was "book-ended" with Grow Groups, an expanded version of Story Groups, adding social gatherings and service projects to the educational opportunities.

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# Pastors

Rev. Idzerd van Dellen 1907-1940

Rev. David D. Bonnema 1924-1927

Rev. Karst Bergsma 1928-1936

Rev. William Van Peurseem 1940-1945

Rev. John Guichelaar 1945-1950

Rev. Henry J. Evenhouse 1951-1952

Rev. Henry N. Erffmeyer 1953-1957

Rev. Robert B. Vermeer 1958-1966

Rev. Jack L. Vander Laan 1967-1975

Rev. Maurice De Young 1974-1975

Rev. Jerrien Gunnink 1976-1987

Rev. John Van Regenmorter 1987-1997

Rev. Mark Van't Hof 1998-2005

Rev. Joy Engelsman 2004-2013

Rev. Joel Schreurs 2006-

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