

“... I will build my church...” Matthew 16:18 “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” Psalm 127:1a

Decades ago, some folks were moved by the simple notion to instruct their children in the knowledge of God and His Word. Probably they had no idea they were founding a work to last for decades that would become the church home for many hundreds of people up to today. But obedience to the Lord does lead to unexpected and wonderful results. We who are Rothbury Community Church benefit from the foundations faithfully tended by our church forefathers. Sixty years ago, tiny rural Rothbury, Michigan, situated just south of the hilly fruit-growing region of western Michigan still patiently struggled upward from the depression years. In the early 1940's travel was not so convenient as we know it in 2004, and people of Oceana County did not just jump in their cars to drive 10 or 20 miles to the store or to church. The people who lived in the village of Rothbury did their business here, socialized with their neighbors, sent their children to school here, up through eighth grade anyway. No one had much money. Everyone in the village eked out a living the best way they could. Rothbury was in farming country and the village and people who lived here primarily served the outlying farm community. The railroad, not the highway, was the epicenter of town then. It was around the railroad crossing that gravel-surfaced Winston Road was lined with coal yards, feed store, bean and potato warehouses, pickle canning factory, lumber yard, hardware store, blacksmith shop, and the community center. Out on the highway crossroads was Webber's Garage, Sam's Grocery Store, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church building. The Methodist Church, which had stood on the north side of Winston Road on the rise just east of the Carlton Creek valley, had burned down. That left only the Seventh Day Adventist and the Catholic churches in Rothbury. But Christian mothers in the village knew that training in the scriptures was essential for their young children. Mildred Longnecker was one such Christian. Mildred, mother of two young children, met with her friends Esther 1 Clements, Florence Eagles, Nita Squires, and Lola Ramey, who were also young Christian mothers to discuss what could be done to provide Bible teaching for their children. One of the basic issues was where to hold the lessons. The Grant Township Hall, out a ways on Winston Road, on the corner of land owned by Oliver and Mildred Longnecker, was not used on Sundays and was available. The usage was negotiated, setup was initiated, communications made, and five families met for the first time to teach the Bible to their collective dozen kids. Faithfulness and simple adherence to God's Word proved attractive, and the Sunday School grew as other families – the Cooks, Johansens, Storms, Christians, McGarrys, Webbers, Pepings, Lohmeyers, Lohmans, and Krulls brought their children to the burgeoning little flock. It was getting crowded in this old Township Hall. If the Lord was going to keep adding to their numbers – and it was obvious

that He was – a bigger space was needed. There was another building in the village that was not being used at that time. The Seventh Day Adventist Church had ceased using their building located just off of U.S. 31 not too long before due to declining membership. It seemed to make sense to put it to use. More negotiations led to the three-year old Sunday School finding itself in a more spacious facility. Spacious, but spartan. The building was pretty bare, with no electric lights, no pews, and only an old pot-bellied stove for heat. February of '46 was cold and the little group huddled around that stove, brought closer in spirit as they drew close to the stove's warmth. As fellowship grew closer, the people knew that the Lord was leading them to a further step. This was a local church in the making, and it seemed to be happening by itself. The adults needed to be fed as well from God's Word; that meant a qualified, trained pastor, was needed. The families in this post depression rural community did not have the money to support a fulltime pastor. A part time pastor, who had other means of support seemed like the best option. Besides, a part time pastor fit 2

Afterword Since 2004 God has continued in his faithfulness to Rothbury Community Church as we seek to bring glory to him alone. There are still many members who can recall the stories laid out in the previous pages, and they can add a few more of their own if you take the time to ask them. A legacy of biblical fidelity has been passed down to the current generations that make up the membership of Rothbury Community Church, and as it stands today, that legacy will be found in the next generation as well. Upon reading the story of Rothbury Community Church it becomes apparent that not only has much changed with the church family, but the surrounding community has changed as well. Instead of coal yards and trains, there is a major paved bike path. Instead of beans and potatoes, there is gas and donuts being sold along Winston Road. Instead of a pickle canning factory, there is a steel plant employing many. While the times change, we can be thankful to God that he and the Gospel do not. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). It is the task of Rothbury Community Church to continue in the footsteps of our forbearers as we seek to be faithful in investing biblical truth in the next generation and to reach out to those around us who need to know Jesus as their Savior. May he enable us by his Spirit to be steadfast in that calling.