

## HISTORY OF HASTINGS BRANCH/WARD

In November 1952, the Detroit Stake (later renamed Bloomfield Hills Stake) was organized as the first stake in Michigan. The Hastings area was then a part of the West Michigan District of the Detroit Stake. Thirty members met as a part of the Battle Creek Branch in the Odd Fellows Hall in Lakeview. Wilma McMillan was the first member of the Church in Barry County arriving in March 1956. Her husband Robert joined the church five years later. That same year a new chapel was built on South Capital Avenue in Battle Creek. There were three other families living in the Hastings area, the Mixes, the Slocums and the McVays for a total of 18 members.

In the summer of 1964, a home Sunday School was created with Robert McMillan as Sunday School President. It met at the UAW Local 138 Union Hall at 127 W. Apple Street in Hastings. Full time missionaries were assigned to Hastings, Elders Wolfrey and Lemon. The first person to be baptized was Lucy Karcher. In the fall of 1964, the Sunday School moved to an old Methodist Church at Podunk Lake, five miles south of Hastings. Robert McMillan remembers taking turns to build a fire in an old wood furnace to heat the building. The Sunday School was discontinued in the summer of 1965 and Hastings members were assigned back to Battle Creek.

The Hastings Branch was created in September 1973 under the direction of Lansing Stake President Sylvan Wittwer as a dependent branch of the Grand Rapids Ward. Kent Gibson was called as Branch President with Robert Buckner and Robert Acheson as counselors. Larry Sheneman was then the Bishop of the Grand Rapids Second Ward. The first meeting was held September 9, 1973 at the Lutheran Church at 510 S. Jefferson Street. By that fall, a house was purchased at 214 S. Hanover Street for meetings. The full time missionaries lived in the upstairs apartment. In December 1974, Hastings grew to become an independent branch in the Lansing Stake.

In March 1975, the Hastings Branch became a part of the newly formed Grand Rapids Stake. In the spring of that same year, the Branch outgrew the house and moved to an old church on 502 E. Bond Street. Ken Gibson was succeeded as Branch President by Ed Thoms (December 1976), Robert McMillan (September 1977), David McMonigle (November 1980), Russell Solmes (March 1983), Glenn Steorts (Sept 1986), James Bailey (Sept 1989), Al Pandl (Sept 1994) and Ken Stewart (July 1999).

On September 10, 1983, ground was broken for the Hastings Chapel at 600 N. Airport Road. The first meeting in the new phase one chapel was February 25, 1984. On December 28, 1986, the Hastings Chapel costing \$ 750,000 was dedicated by Stake President Kent Price in the present second phase building.

Hastings Branch became a Ward on October 20, 2002 with Branch President Ken Stewart called as the first Bishop with Doug Zaccanelli and Jack Kane as counselors. Charles Stoddard was serving as the Stake President in 2002. He recalls the following anecdote. "I remember that President Stewart kept bugging me about Hastings Branch becoming a Ward. The Church policy is that a ward must have at least 15 active Melchizedek Priesthood bearers and 300 members. Hastings Branch had sufficient active Melchizedek Priesthood holders but not close to 300 members. To accommodate President Stewart, the Stake Presidency filled out and signed the necessary paperwork to make Hastings a Ward but left the application undated. The instructions were for President Stewart to mail it the day that

Hastings had 300 members. Later, the Curtis Reed family with their ten children moved in. Since Hastings then had exactly 300 members, President Stewart immediately mailed the application to Church headquarters in Salt Lake. It was fortunate because the very next day, Orville Pickard died, lowering the number to 299.”

Because of having few Priesthood holders, women have been the backbone in Hastings for many years. Among the many women who have supplied strength, five examples of Hastings “pioneers” are Wilma McMillan (the first member mentioned earlier), Lucy Karcher (first baptism mentioned earlier), Jeanne Franck, Dawne Gibson and Bea Dunham.

On Sunday, February 17, 2013 Brother and Sister Lemon from Cleveland visited the Hastings Ward. He was the Elder (then it was the Great Lakes Mission) who baptized Lucy Karcher nearly fifty years earlier. They visited her in her home as she was 99 years old, the oldest member in the Grand Rapids Stake at that time.

Another Hastings “pioneer” was Jeannie Franck. She was baptized in 1973. She was called as Organist and served in that calling for 37 years until her death in November 2010. A fourth “pioneer” was Dawne Gibson whose husband Kent was the first branch president. After her husband was released, she continued to take pictures of every new family in Hastings. She did so until the last six months of her life when she was too ill to do it anymore.

A fifth “pioneer” is Bea Dunham. Among other callings, she served as Sunday School President. It is a Priesthood calling but the Branch President did not know it.

Others who have served as Bishop in the Hastings Ward after Bishop Stewart were Bernard Wright (2005) and Curtis Reed (2009), Doug Ashby (2014) & Matt Morse (2017).

Full time missionaries called from Hastings have included:

David Buckner (Philippines)	Kari Gregory (Tallahassee);
Robert McMillan (Sacramento)	Rebecca Reed (Germany);
Gregg Gibson (Korea)	Michael Reed (Thailand);
Geoff Gibson (Netherlands);	Melony Reed (Los Angeles);
Erin Solmes (Venezuela);	John & Jan Sherman (Mississippi);
Andrew Sherman (Brazil);	Alex McMillan (Fiji);
Ben Stewart	Lisa Reed (Salt Lake);
(Dominican Republic);	Jacob Bailey (Idaho);
Aaron Gregory (Mexico);	Harmony Reed (Provo);
Ray Stewart (Uruguay);	Kara Ashby (Taiwan);
Joshua Steorts (Montreal);	Matthew Johnson (Malaga, Spain);
Jeff Pandl (Ogden);	Chris Petersen (Las Vegas);
Thomas Hurst (Brazil);	Natalie Reed (Las Vegas)
Aaron Sherman (Mexico);	Abby Morse (El Salvador)
Brad Myers (Chile);	Hyrum Reed (South Africa)
James Bailey Jr. (Peru);	Jared Bailey (Salt Lake)
Levi Solmes (Japan);	Evan Petersen (Prague)
Ananda Zaccanelli (Tucson);	Sam Johnson (Salt Lake)
Isaac Solmes (Mongolia);	Emily Solis (Utica, New York)

HASTINGS BRANCH  
Grand Rapids Michigan State

OLD HASTINGS CHAPEL  
582 E. BOND ST., HASTINGS



HASTINGS BRANCH  
Grand Rapids Michigan State

HASTINGS WARD CHAPEL  
600 N. AIRPORT RD., HASTINGS

