

Gethsemane Church History

In February of 1977 Pastor Frank Noyes, his wife Judie and their two children, Michael and Nathan, met with Brother Byron and Sister Edda Stewart and their two children, Rob and Byron Jr., along with Sister Patty Heflin in the house the Noyes' rented at 307 Fulton Road, Marquette Heights, Illinois for the first service of Gethsemane Church. The first worship service was in their living room with prayer and preaching by Pastor Noyes. From that day church services were held morning and evening each Lord's Day and on Wednesday evening in the Noyes home.

Pastor Noyes was previously pastor of the General Baptist Church at 1518 Hillview Drive before going to Greenville, South Carolina to attend Bob Jones University Graduate School. It was while in Greenville that Pastor Noyes was praying for direction. One night he was in deep prayer and he received a definite leading from the Lord to return to Pekin and start a church. After praying more over a period of time this leading was confirmed. Brother Byron Stewart and his family had left the General Baptist Church where Pastor Noyes served on Hillview Drive. They were visiting area churches looking for a home church. After talking and praying the Stewart and Noyes families decided to start Gethsemane Church. The name "Gethsemane" came about by a time of prayer. Both families had taken a time to pray about the name of the church. When they met to discuss the name of the church the Lord had led Sister Edda to call the church Gethsemane. Pastor Noyes had also been led by the Lord to call the name Gethsemane. So separately and without each others' knowledge they had been led to call the church Gethsemane. When they met and told each other how they had been led to the name Gethsemane Church this name was officially adopted and recorded.

Gethsemane Church continued to meet in Pastor Noyes' home in Marquette Heights until May 2, 1977. Pastor Noyes visited door-to-door and visitors came from that effort. In May the church rented the building at 230 Court Street in Pekin to hold services. The building was old and not in very good shape, but provided space for folding chairs to be set up. The Noel-Henderson Funeral Home agreed to loan the church about 20 folding chairs. Pastor Charles Mayberry, Jr., the pastor of the Full Gospel Church in South Pekin donated about 20 song books. Services were held in that building until December 3, 1978. While in the building on Court Street the church grew to about fifteen in attendance, along with the birth of a daughter, Rachel Elisabeth, to Pastor Noyes and family. During this time Brother Frank Wilkins, a retired Free Methodist minister, agreed to help and began attending services at Gethsemane Church. Brother Donald Jacobs began to attend and Sister Clara Gates also attended among others. Several people were saved.

On December 3, 1978 the church rented an area at the Pekin Arena to have services until a suitable place could be found. The building on Court Street had been damaged by a storm and was condemned by the city. The only place the church could find on short notice to continue services was a room in the Pekin Arena. The room was adjacent to a dressing room for ice hockey players; consequently it was not uncommon for people to walk through the small room during church services. However, there were new people who started attending while Gethsemane Church was meeting in the Arena.

Mother's Day Sunday, May 8, 1979, Gethsemane Church held its first service at 1518 Hillview Drive. The General Baptist Church in Pekin merged with a sister church in East Peoria and decided to sell the building. Gethsemane Church was able to purchase the building on a contract-for-deed. the address of the building was later changed for 911 purposes to 1601 Frederick Drive. Gethsemane Church has steadily grown over the years from the original ten in attendance.