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This Presbyterian Church was built in 1889 at Fifth and Pennsylvania in Liberal. Courtesy photo

By MARY LAMBERT

- Special to the Leader & Times

When the railroad decided to lay their rails across Seward County, it purchased land that was very close to the homestead of S.S. Rodgers who had established a general store and a post office in 1885.

With the plat for a new town site completed, the lots were offered for sale on April 13, 1888, and within eight days, 83 plank constructed houses were built in the town on the prairie that became known as “Liberal.”

Three months later on July 8, 1888, seven Presbyterian citizens organized the first church in this prairie community.

There was no church building yet, so the church worshiped in a local store building on Third Street between Kansas Avenue and Lincoln Avenue. In less than a year, they had built and moved into a frame building (location is now part of the County Court House Complex).

Ten years later, they moved the church building to Fourth and Lincoln (location of First National Bank drive up bank). It would be 30 years later, in 1927, that the frame building would be replaced with a new brick building that the church would worship in for the next 38 years and possibly would still be there, if it had not been destroyed by fire in May 1965.

They wasted no time in selling the old property, acquiring a new location and plans for a new church building. This new location was north of the city limits on North Western Avenue in the middle of wheat fields with no buildings in the area yet.

It was only 14 months after the fair, and they were able to move into the new building in time to celebrate the church's 78th birthday on July 8, 1966. The current sanctuary was added 12 years later in 1978.

The 1889 church building was also home to other new churches in the community.

During those early years, as new churches were established in the new community, the members of the Presbyterian Church reached out to them and offered their church building as a place for these new churches to have their worship services.

They knew 125 years ago that supporting the community was important and what better way than to open the doors of their church to their friends and neighbors to come and worship.

This was the beginning of what would become a natural thing for the members of the

Presbyterian Church.....stepping up to fill the needs of a growing and developing community that is still being done 125 years later.

In January 2010, the Presbyterian Church opened their doors once again to a new church in the community. Templo Puerta Del Cielo, a Hispanic congregation in need a place to worship until they can afford to acquire or build a church building large enough to house their membership, have been meeting at the Presbyterian Church on Sunday and Wednesday evenings for three and a half years.

Community organizations find a 'home'

The Presbyterian Church has also been home to many community organizations. The number of groups that have used the church building for various meetings is way too long to list.

Just the number of scout troops – both boy and girl – that have met in the Presbyterian Church, as well as the 4-H clubs, and other organizations over these 125 years has been numerous. No one really knows the actual number. And several are still meeting there today.

When the Liberal community saw the need for a community food cupboard, it was the Presbyterian Church that gave them a room to use as their 'store room' – and they are still using it today, all these years later. Groups like the 'mother to mother' ministries have also met in the church as have many civic organizations.

New day care under development

Now 125 years later, a new need has been brought to the church's attention — the community's need for day care centers. Hoping to be ready for their first day by Aug. 1, a 'crew' of volunteers is busy painting, cleaning, and arranging the furniture.

To bring the church up to code for a day care, it is necessary to add more fire alarms, and other

safety measures including an attached, fenced in and shaded play area.

Day cares are not new, as a mission of this Liberal church. When the first day care was started by the Liberal Soroptimist Club in the 1960s, the Presbyterian Women were among those that gave monthly financial support.

Current leadership

There has been 28 pastors serve the Presbyterian congregation during the first 125 years. With the resignation of Pastor Dr. Stephen Seville effective Oct. 31, 2012, the church is currently without an installed pastor.

Assisting with worship services each week have been various lay ministers and former pastors living in the region. It has been a wonderful experience for the membership to have the opportunity to hear from such a wide variety of speakers each week.

Since Presbyterian churches are governed by their ruling elders, the church continues to be very active in serving their membership and community.

In addition to paid staff, the session is also being assisted in day to day church matters by the Southern Presbytery of Kansas, which has assigned the Rev. Denise Pass, minister of the Presbyterian Church in Garden City, to serve as the moderator of the Session, and the Rev. Terry Woodbury, retired Presbyterian minister living in Leoti, to serve as the Presbytery liaison.

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