

A History of the Ashtabula First Church of the Nazarene



Original church location at the corner of Washington Ave and W. 57th Street.

Ashtabula First Church of the Nazarene began as a dream in the heart of a man named J.B. Neely, a Methodist minister turned Nazarene. His dream was for a Wesleyan Holiness church to be established in Ashtabula County. At a tent meeting in the summer of 1921 revival meetings were held and District Superintendent Dr. J. H. Sloan was the speaker. The Lord moved during this time to make Neely's dream a reality.

At the close of the tent meetings, Ashtabula First Church was organized with 40 charter members and services continued in a classroom at Chestnut St. School. Rev. George Book served as supply pastor until Revs. Frank and Helen Lehman were appointed in 1922.

Soon after Ashtabula First was organized, plans were made to purchase and construct a church building at the corner of Washington Ave. and W. 57th St. The core structure was finished in 1923. Erecting a building wasn't the only task at hand during those early days; the faithful members of Ashtabula First Church continued spreading the gospel and message of holiness throughout the county and established Cherry Valley Church of the Nazarene.

In 1925, Rev. W.F. Miller pastored First Church followed by Rev. C.B. Clark in 1927. By 1931, Rev. RJ Smeltzer was called to be the pastor. During this time a tent meeting was held in Jefferson, Ohio which resulted in the organization of Jefferson Church of the Nazarene on August 7, 1932.

With an intense focus on evangelism, Ashtabula First Church began a radio ministry under the leadership of Rev. A.W. Gould who arrived in 1934. In the ensuing years yet another church was spawned from Ashtabula First. Two families from Ashtabula First began meeting in an abandoned church in Kelloggsville which developed into the Kelloggsville Church of the Nazarene in 1940.

Almost twenty years later the church recalled Revs. Frank and Helen Lehman as pastors and saw the church through the construction of a fellowship hall, two garages, and eight Sunday School rooms to accommodate the growth that was taking place. Around 1949 a few faithful members from First Church ventured out again to the West of Ashtabula to form the Geneva Church of the Nazarene.



Current location at 1820 S. Ridge West

Sixteen pastors have served Ashtabula First Church at two different locations. In 1969 the church moved to its present site at 1820 South Ridge West and was dedicated to the Lord on Sunday, June 21st, 1970.

Rev. Michael Legg and his wife Betsy were called to Ashtabula First Church in 1985. He remarked that although he was a young man of 32, the Lord had given him a shepherd's heart. His ministry was hallmarked by a gentle and enduring spirit as he served the church and community for 32 years, the longest serving pastor to date. During his tenure the church expanded its mission focus through: Whosoever Club, an evangelistic outreach to children and their families; the annual Naz-Car Cruise-in, a unique and family-friendly event featuring classic cars; and Work and Witness trips across the United States and overseas.

Pastor Sean & Jaime Hampton and their family were welcomed to Ashtabula First Church in November of 2018. We anticipate a great adventure as we engage those have not yet been reached for the sake of Christ's Kingdom.

The rich heritage passed down from our forefathers still impacts Ashtabula First Church with direct descendants of J.B. Neely joining other members in evangelistic mission ventures. Today, Ashtabula First is still focused on spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and deepening discipleship. The message of holiness and its practical daily application remains at the core of our DNA. May the fire of our devotion to Jesus Christ light the way for future generations to share the compelling gospel with those who do not yet know Him.