



1918-1922

“I have been manacled”

Donald G. MacLeod

Although it was a relatively short time that Central was without a pastor, the six months between Dr. Mauzé's resignation and the selection of a new man were characterized by the Session as “trying and critical times.” There were those who were “discouraged and disheartened that a suitable pastor could not be more speedily procured.” With a sense of relief as well as hope, Dr. Donald MacLeod was called in December, 1917. He was promised a \$5,000 salary and two months vacation each year.

Donald Campbell MacLeod was an anomaly among Central's pastors. All previous pastors were Southerners: Dr. MacLeod was a Canadian from Nova Scotia. He had previously served congregations in Washington, D. C., and Springfield, Illinois, and was installed as Central's seventh pastor on January 13, 1918.

Under Dr. MacLeod's leadership, the church continued to grow. By 1922, both membership and benevolent giving were at their highest levels in Central's history, 1106 and \$16,466, respectively. The Sunday School took “a decided step forward” with the employment of an educational director, Mr. Donald MacCluer, in 1919.

Following the recommendations of the Session and General Assembly, the women of the church merged their five separate societies into a Women's Auxiliary in 1920. The move was designed to increase the effectiveness of all ministries. Although the women understood and endorsed the change, their final individual reports to the congregation were bittersweet. The report from the Ladies' Guild was typical:

On April 10th, 1919, the Ladies' Guild entered upon what is known to be its last year of usefulness as an organized body, and it is with a feeling of reluctance and sadness that I speak the words of our farewell report...



Miss Lizzie D. Black, who was particularly involved in the missions of the church. As a leader of the "girls mission band" she helped to raise money for Dr. Wm. Ford Bull, Central's missionary to Korea. She also organized the "Young Ladies Missionary Society" before the turn of the century.

This report is in a measure the Swan song of the Ladies' Guild which expires in the serene belief that its soul is to find a delightful habitat in the new body which is to devote its energies to carrying forward those enterprises of the church which require in their execution a perfection of finesse that it would be unfair to expect of mere men.

As reflected in its new name, the Women's Auxiliary was seen as a supportive ministry of the church. In 1919, with women comprising over 60% of the congregation, Dr. MacLeod suggested that a Board of Deaconesses be established to aid and support both the pastor and the deacons. Although the prospective Board was approved by the Session, the whole idea seems to have faded from the records.

Also fading away was the mutual trust between the officers and Dr. MacLeod. Although the Session expressed satisfaction with his pastorate early on and despite steady growth and an apparently healthy future, Dr. MacLeod was not mentioned by name in the sessional reports for 1921 and 1922. By then, a serious conflict had developed over authority and control in the church.

In a letter to the congregation, the Session pinpointed the problem from their perspective:

[Dr. MacLeod] knew that every church in our denomination is ruled by its bench of elders, not by its pastor, nor by the congregation at large. Both the ruling elders and the pastor, the teaching elder, are elected by the congregation, and the pastor has no greater authority in the church session than any other elder. If Dr. MacLeod did not approve this form of government or feel that he could live or work under it, he should never have accepted a call to a church of our denomination. We believe a great many of the difficulties that Dr. MacLeod has experienced have been due to his failure to recognize the authority of the session.

The letter indicated that some elders and deacons had approached Dr. MacLeod in private, advising him that a number of officers and long-time members had threatened to leave the church if he stayed. According to the officers, Dr. MacLeod felt the majority of the congregation was on his side and he refused to go.



Mary Etta Parks Stixrud, second from left, was a member of Central. She served with her husband Dr. Thomas Stixrud as a medical missionary to Africa.

In an attempt to avoid “public scandal,” dissatisfied officers then conceived the idea of organizing a new church in University City where dissidents could transfer their membership. Here, too, the officers felt that Dr. MacLeod blocked them. Dr. MacLeod was a member of an interdenominational group, the Church Federation, that had advised against the establishment of a Southern Presbyterian Church in University City. Although Dr. MacLeod had dissented in the Federation’s action, the officers blamed him for not actively advocating the new church plan.

In October, 1922, elders again pressed Dr. MacLeod to resign. He again refused. The following Sunday, the beleaguered pastor spoke of the controversy from the pulpit. Declaring “I have been manacled,” Dr. MacLeod likened the Session to “little dogs” nipping at his heels. On November 23, he submitted his resignation to the St. Louis Presbytery.

Although the controversy made front page news, Dr. MacLeod refused to make any further statements. When asked if he had anything to say regarding the truth of the assertions made against him, he said, “Nothing, except that it is all inane foolishness...It is petty.”

The relative silence of both Dr. MacLeod and the official records make it difficult to sort through the conflict. The elders were correct in asserting that authority in the local church rested with the Session. Yet without a system of rotation, authority could be concentrated in the hands of a few who remained in the office for life, as Dr. MacLeod had intimated. It is also probable that as a Nova Scotian, outside the Southern Presbyterian tradition, Dr. MacLeod was perceived as an outsider and at least part of the conflict stemmed from differences in personality and leadership style.

The statistical report for the year ending in April, 1923, reflects the toll taken by the controversy: “We have received into membership, upon profession of their faith in Christ, nineteen; upon re-affirmation of faith, two; and forty-five by letter from other churches. We have granted letters [of dismissal] to two hundred and eighteen...”



Mrs. Hallie (W. C.) Winsborough. Mrs. Winsborough grew up in Central and as a housewife in Kansas City, organized the Women's Auxiliaries of the Southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS) in 1912. She also served as Superintendent of Women's Work until 1927 and in 1920, Central women adopted her plan for organization. (Department of History (Montrent), PCUSA)