

Mr. Fles is the oldest minister in this city in point of service and few, if any, ministers of the Christian Reformed Church are better entitled to retirement for long service than he.

Several years ago Mr. Fles nearly suffered a breakdown and many of his congregation advised his retirement then as they feared his health might give way. He is 66 years old.

Mr. Fles' entrance into the ministry was the result of special qualifications rather than long training. At the time when he preached his first sermon he had had no instruction except under the private tutoring of Rev. D. Breukelaar, a noted preacher and teacher, who established himself at Aalten, Province of Gelderland, Netherlands, when Mr. Fles was a boy of 15 and took the lad under his guidance.

At Aalten where Mr. Fles was born June 2, 1842, his father Jacob Isaac Fles was a Jewish rabbi preacher in the synogogue and leader of the Jews at Aalten. The elder Fles was converted and pursuing a brave course announced his renunciation of the Israelite faith from the pulpit of his synagogue, the result being that his enraged congregation drove him out of the synagogue.

As has been stated, young Fles was 15 years old when he commenced to receive private instruction. At the age of 19 he was drafted for the army and served one and one-half years. Most of his service was at the renowned garrison of Maastricht, Province of Limburg. When he was about 23 years old his instructor induced him to attend a classical gathering at Vaarseveldt. There he met Rev. Jacob Van Andel, noted theologian and writer then a pastor at Zutphen. Mr. Fles was called upon to speak before this fathering and chose for his text Romans 8. He was personally complimented by the Zutphen scholar and was assigned to preach at Winterswyk near his hometown. Although he was not an ordained minister and could not even claim a thorough theological training. He preached his first sermon from a church pulpit at Winterswyk on Ascension Day 1865.

In 1869 he entered the theological seminary at Kampes and graduated in 1873. He was doing evangelistic work the same year when he was called by the Holland Presbyterian Church at Cedar Grove, Wis. and accepted. He had married the year previous to Johanna Hermina Bokhorst and brought his wife and infant daughter to this country with him. In 1880 he was called to Pella, Iowa, three years later to Zeeland, Mich. and in 1890 came to Muskegon. At Zeeland he was installed pastor of the Christian Reformed Church by Rev. Leonard Rietdyke who afterward died while pastor of the First Reformed Church of this city.

Only a year after Mr. Fles had become pastor of the Muskegon congregation the church, chapel and parsonage were destroyed in the Pine Street fire. The congregation was not yet free from debt on the buildings, but they set about to raise money for a new church. During his pastorate the church, parsonage and Hartford Street School were erected and all are now free from debt, while the congregation is recognized as one of the most flourishing in the city.

Mr. and Mrs. Fles will probably continue to reside in this city, as their two sons, Isaac J. Fles and Benjamin J. Fles, are in business here. One of their daughters, Mrs. Peter R. Zuidema, also resides in this city, and their two other daughters are married to clergymen, Mrs. John J. Hiemenga residing in Grand Rapids and Mrs. Cornelius De Leeuw in Chicago.

#### October 26, 1908

Rev. J. I. Fles, who resigned from the pastorate of the First Christian Reformed Church last summer after more years of service than any other pastor in Muskegon, will preach his farewell sermon next Sunday afternoon. Many of the members of the congregation have been hoping that arrangements might be made to induce Mr. Fles to continue in the pastorate.