

# **FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

**IOWA CITY, IOWA**

**1863-1963**

**AN INFORMAL HISTORY**

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of the  
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH

(DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) of IOWA CITY

1863-1963

by

MARGARET A. and ROBERT M. HEDGES



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Our apologies go, too, to the many, many devoted and faithful workers in the church whose names would certainly have appeared in chapter after chapter if space had permitted.

Margaret and Robert Hedges  
April 1968

## Chapter I – Beginnings

1855-1863

The first meeting of what was to become the Christian church of Iowa City was held soon after Jesse Higbee, a farmer and lay minister of the Christian church in Pennsylvania, came to live in Johnson County in 1855. Mr. Higbee and his father-in-law, David Neumire, gathered their families, friends and neighbors together at Higbee Grove southeast of Iowa City and began to conduct services in a little school house there. Soon they were holding church services every Sunday, the two men taking turns preaching.

Jesse Higbee was an enthusiastic Christian. As a young man he had been converted at one of Alexander Campbell's revival meetings near Pittsburgh, Pa. His son Arthur tells about it in a letter written in 1938:

Alexander Campbell came through that part of the country and held a great meeting there. Father united and many others of the Baptist faith, and it created a lot of talk, and Grandfather Higbee put my father's things together and told him that he had disgraced the Baptist church and his father's family, and he would have to leave home. Mr. Campbell hearing of it called my father and said, "You come with me. I need you to help." Father was put in charge of one of the newly organized churches near Pittsburgh where he continued for a considerable time, and the thing that gave my father the greatest satisfaction was the fact that his own father and mother were received into the fellowship of the church that he was serving, and continued during their lives as members.\*

\*All quoted material in this booklet is from sources documented and filed in the Archives of the Iowa City Christian Church.



In Iowa, Mr. Higbee's enthusiasm attracted families from Iowa City as well as from the surrounding farms, and the church began to grow. There are 65 names on the earliest membership list, and the Sunday school was said to be "very strong".

Not much precise information about those early days is available, but we do know that elders and deacons were "ordained by prayer and imposition of hands." And we know that baptisms took place in the Iowa River, the custom being at that time to use any convenient small river or stream for baptizing. A letter written by a visiting minister, Reverend D. S. Burnet, to Alexander Campbell in 1863 says, "Today I baptized eight persons in the Iowa River, in the presence of an immense concourse of witnesses."

We can assume that there were problems in those days, too. There is an old list of members with columns for "deceased, dismissed by letter, fallen away from the church." Dismissals were made after solemn discussion by the elders, for such reasons as drunkenness, non-payment of debts, and habitual failure to attend church service.

The church prospered, however, and in 1863 it organized officially with 84 charter members. They signed the following formal agreement:

We, the undersigned disciples of Christ in Iowa City and surrounding country, have this day, March 28, 1863, entered into church relationship with each other, the organization to be known as the Church of Christ at Iowa City, Johnson County, Iowa, and we do hereby agree that in all matters of faith and practice we will be governed by the word of God and by that alone.

That same year, the congregation was delighted to be able to buy a building "in the center of Iowa City" for its church. The *Johnson County History* describes it as a square, blue-grey, painted brick building, and it already, in 1863, had an interesting history

The Methodist Protestants had built it in 1841 on one of the quarter-blocks reserved by the Territory for the use of churches, and Governor Lucas had participated in the cornerstone laying. For several years it was used on Sundays for church services, and on weekdays for school. First it was the Snethen Seminary, then the



Col. Kimball Porter

Iowa City College, then for a while it was used by a private school, and finally it was a "free public school". At one time a special Sunday school for the blind was held there, too. The Methodist Protestant denomination, however, was never very strong in Iowa City. When they disbanded and put their building up for sale, Colonel Kimball Porter, a staunch Christian church member, bought it for \$1,300 and promptly resold it to the church for \$800.

Col. Porter was a highly respected and valued member of the Body Corporate (Church Board) of the early church. His obituary contains this interesting old-fashioned eulogy:

"His large business associations in connection with the Western Stage Co. had made his name familiar throughout the State, and no person within the range of our knowledge ever transacted such large and such a varied business to more universal acceptance. In his business as well as in his private intercourse with his neighbors and friends, he was ever courteous, kind and true—yielding respect to the rights and feelings of others."

Col. Porter's wife contributed an important furnishing for the newly purchased church—a marble-topped table which was a family heirloom brought by her family from Wooster, Ohio. A letter used at the 100th anniversary celebration of the church in 1963 told how Mrs. Nettie Lake remembered watching as a child while two deaconesses prepared weekly communion on this table. She says, "The wine was held in a silver tankard and served in two



silver goblets. Two plates to match held the bread which was baked weekly by some member of the church."

#### 1863-1872

The church had no regular minister in 1863 when Elder D. S. Burnet, a traveling evangelist and personal friend of Alexander Campbell, was assisting the congregation to become settled in their new downtown building. In March that year he arranged to hold a "protracted meeting" at the "Christian Chapel" in Iowa City. The weekly newspaper, "Iowa City Republican," contained this approving paragraph.

"Elder Burnet is an Evangelist in the Church of Christ (sometimes styled Christian or Disciples Church) an able and elegant speaker. Let those of our citizens who wish to hear and learn for themselves to do so . . . It is desirable that all persons in the city or surrounding country who have formerly been identified with that church in the older States will be present at this meeting and enter into the organization, that they may have a home religiously. Let all turn out and hear. SEATS FREE TO ALL."

Brother Burnet's meetings concluded successfully. When he left, he wrote to Alexander Campbell that he regretted leaving, as interest was on the increase. There were 85 persons present at his final service, and he then ordained Samuel Lowe, "a good preacher", to be their minister. A few months later Samuel Lowe's brother, John Lowe, succeeded him in the pulpit.

In 1865 John C. Hay, a student from Princeton "and but a recent convert", came on a visit to Iowa City, was called to the pastorate, and remained until 1869. This was a period of Christian Church growth in the county. A church was established at Tiffin, the church at West Liberty was greatly strengthened, and other work was accomplished throughout the county "by this indefatigable minister". One of his achievements was the addition to the Iowa City church of more than 100 members, 70 of whom came by conversion.

Mr. Jesse Berry was called to serve the church in the fall of 1869 and remained for nine months. Then followed an unfortunate circumstance—a few months without a pastor.



J. Madison Williams

J. Madison Williams was a senior student at the University of Iowa when he was called to the ministry in 1870. The record says he was dismayed that "he could find but 57 active members" when he began his preaching. However, he did good work for the church during the two years of his ministry, and 32 names were added to the roll. Mr. Williams graduated from the Normal School of the University and later became the Superintendent of Schools in Iowa City. He was a very popular minister. After being with the church from 1870 until 1872, he was recalled to serve again from 1887 to 1889.

#### 1872-1874

In the summer of 1872 Dr. S. E. Pearre was called to Iowa City and came with his wife to serve the church until 1874. Dr. Pearre was the first pastor to encourage church participation in state and national organizations. At the State Convention of Christian Churches in Davenport, 1872, he was named Secretary, and J. C. Porter of Iowa City became Treasurer.

On Oct. 7, 1873, the Iowa Christian Convention organized formally under the laws of Iowa, with J. W. Porter of Iowa City as Treasurer. For church business purposes the State of Iowa was divided into quarters; the Southeast Quarter containing Iowa City had the most churches and was the most active.





Caroline Neville  
Pearre

Dr. Pearre's wife was a very unusual person. The name Caroline Neville Pearre was known to only a few people when she came with her husband to serve the Iowa City Christian Church in 1872. Ten years later her name was well-known to Christian Church men and women all over the United States. She was a well-educated woman who conducted a small private school for girls in her home in Iowa City. She was highly energetic, and above all, very devout. She had written to a friend that two questions were constant in her daily prayer and Bible reading. "How can women be more useful in strengthening the work of the church? How can our church spread the gospel to 'unentered provinces' of the heathen world?" At that time the Brotherhood of the Disciples of Christ was sponsoring no missionary work of any kind.

Mrs. Pearre tells that she was praying one morning when a thought struck her almost like church bells ringing. We can guess at the words that formed in her mind—"Our church women could get together and form a missionary society. We could collect money." She was truly inspired, and in great excitement she started making plans with friends and local church members. She also wrote to friends and ministers in other communities. Her idea caught on rapidly. In less than a month her own church women were meeting regularly to pray and collect missionary offerings—"even though as yet there was no brotherhood missionary anywhere, and no work to support."

The news of the women's organization soon came to the attention of two editors, J. H. Garrison of *The Christian* and Isaac Errett of *The Christian Standard*. Both men published very laudatory articles describing Mrs. Pearre's organization and its goals.

Nationwide recognition followed this publicity, and small missionary societies sprang up all across the area where there were Christian churches. Mr. Errett quickly realized that this movement had real potential. He suggested that some of the women meet together at the annual general convention in Cincinnati in 1874 and set up a national organization. This was done, and the seventy-five women in attendance created the Christian Women's Board of Missions. Mrs. Pearre of Iowa City was named Executive Secretary.

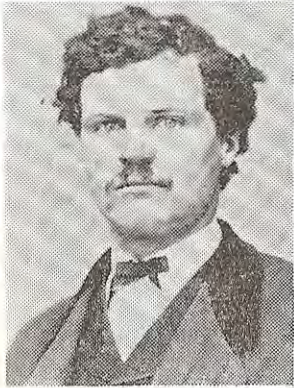
The growth of the Board was amazing. In the first year of its existence the Board had a total of \$430 to spend on missions; five years later it spent \$5,000; and ten years later \$17,000. They helped to send many new missionaries abroad, and they also gave generously to support established mission work. The CWBM even initiated and published a magazine entitled "Missionary Tidings." Local women's groups received much more information on missions this way, and it brought about a new appreciation of missionary work on the part of all Christian church women.

Because of Mrs. Pearre's visionary enthusiasm and energetic common sense, the Church of the Disciples of Christ could more fully carry out Christ's command, "Go . . . into all the world."

#### 1875-1892

For some time after Dr. and Mrs. Pearre left in 1874, the church was without a pastor again. "It was somewhat in debt and discouraged but kept up a Sunday school, which from the beginning seem to have been its main strength." *Johnson County History*.





**Bayard Craig**

talented and devout young couple.

When Rev. Craig began his preaching in September, 1875, there were only 68 church members still active. However, he went to work with a will, and his pastorate apparently was very successful. Approximately 250 new members joined during Dr. Craig's seven year term, and the following paragraph about the church was printed in a local brochure, the "Souvenir and Annual for 1881-82."

"The church has always been at peace. The calamity of a church quarrel has never threatened. It has been generous for the means at its command, has always paid its debts, maintains an excellent prayer meeting, a successful Sunday school, an efficient aid society; and with its present large membership, its freedom from debt, its increased wealth, has cause for thanksgiving and encouragement."

Minutes of board meetings during these successful years show that offerings were made for such diverse needs as the "Burlington Mission" and the "yellow fever sufferers in Memphis" (1878), as well as for many more ordinary purposes. An interesting episode seems to have resulted from the installation of an organ ( foot-pedaled pump organ) sometime in 1876. The minutes say, "Titus took place again in congregation with understanding he did not thereby indorse use of an organ." There seems always to have

been a faction in the Christian church which objected to the use of instrumental music in the service. In some places this splinter group has broken away and formed a denomination known as the Church of Christ. It permits no instrumental music in the church at all.

In 1882 Dr. Craig had to move to Colorado because of his wife's poor health, and Reverend O. P. Miller came to serve the church for two years.

Then came Mr. F. S. Walker, newly graduated from Bethany College. He began his pastorate on July 13, 1884. At that time the congregation was large and enthusiastic. They urged that a new church building be built to replace the "Old Blue Church" which was 43 years old. Apparently it was not feasible that year, but, as one historian puts it, "After many discouragements the present building was erected and formally dedicated on Jan. 23, 1887." (This refers to the building razed in 1967.) The local paper filled three columns with a story about the dedication, and gave this description of the building itself:

"It is brilliantly lighted with stained glass windows upon four sides . . . The arrangement of seats . . . is in amphitheatre form . . . the best form of seating a building . . . The ceiling is of high Gothic roof order . . . The pews are . . . of substantial and comfortable pattern. The pulpit—so to speak, for there is none—is very plain, a dais raised a few steps above the floor, chairs for officiating clergymen, and behind these an alcove for the organ and choir . . . The Christian Church is a real gem, the handsomest protestant church in Iowa City, a model of what the best church should be."

In June 1887 Mr. Walker resigned and the congregation called J. Madison Williams for a second term of service. He was succeeded by M. S. Johnson in 1889; and in 1892 T. J. Dow, a graduate of Drake University, began a ministry of nine years.



## 1892-1901

Economic conditions were good in the early 1890's and the church under M. S. Johnson, and later under T. J. Dow reflected the general prosperity. A new pump organ was substituted for the old one, and plans for an addition were made (but not immediately carried out). Many evangelistic meetings were held, and missionary offerings were relatively large. The fact that Reverend Dow was satisfied with his annual salary of \$1,000 in 1898 evidently shows that a dollar bought a lot in goods and services at that time.

Dr. Dow's tenure, 1892-1901, was the longest and in some ways the most satisfactory in the history of the church. Four hundred members were added to the roll during his nine years, and the *Johnson County History* says: "In all its departments the church was splendidly organized." Dr. Dow resigned in 1901 to accept a position with the East Side Church in Des Moines, and the church board expressed their appreciation for his years of service with a farewell gift of "\$30 in gold".

## Chapter II – Growth Years

### 1901-1918

The congregation then issued a call to C. P. Leach who had just finished his work at Yale University. He entered the field "with all the enthusiasm of the young man who loves his work and thinks it the most important thing in the world." One result of his enthusiasm was a weekly news-sheet called: "THE TRUMPET: a Religious Newspaper Published Each Friday." It featured news of general religious interest, and contained the local Christian Church news and announcements. At times it had exhortations to attend prayer meetings and evangelistic meetings of all kinds. There was also a running account of a contest with the Burlington Sunday school for the highest attendance on Sunday morning. An average Sunday might have been one like November 27, 1904

when the bulletin board showed: Att: 183; Coll: \$5.05. But the minister's goal was: Att: 400. The "Trumpet's" headline one week read, "Burlington Has It — The 400 Banner. We Must Have It." A boxed reminder farther down the page read, "If you do not go elsewhere to Sunday-school, come to the Christian Church next Sunday morning at 9:30. Hear the orchestra." The 400 Banner made spasmodic visits to Iowa City for several years until the contest was dropped. The orchestra was a lively



Sara Hart

one made up of young people and directed by a volunteer from the church.

Associated with the Sunday school in those vigorous years was Miss Sara Hart, a student, teacher and would-be missionary.



The minutes of the board meetings for the years 1901-1908 show that the church was active and outgoing. The sanctuary was used for a variety of public meetings. In 1903 the State Convention convened there, and the next year the church hosted the Christian Endeavor Convention. The YMCA met regularly there. On a week night in 1906 a Mr. Page presented a lecture entitled "Electricity: A Final Answer." Many people at that time thought that electricity was "unnatural" and against the will of God, as well as being dangerous, unpredictable and incomprehensible. Popular lectures such as this helped to dispel ignorance and fear.

The church women were active and enthusiastic, too, and around 1900 a group of them had formed an organization called the WMB's. Literally these initials stood for Women's Mission Board, but the ladies always claimed that they stood for We Mean Business, and indeed it seemed that they did. These tireless women were devoted to mission work, but also gave of their unlimited energies to many problems of the local church, its building and its program. The WMB's raised money for the church, served large meals for many occasions, cleaned and supervised the kitchen, helped the needy, and RAISED MONEY for the church. Usually the largest project of their year was the pre-Christmas Bazaar, at which many delightful and delicious objects of the ladies' own making were sold. Sometimes they also sold gift items donated by foreign missionaries or by other travelers. In a short period of years the WMB's raised enough money to order the pipe organ that many members ardently desired.

The installation of the pipe organ was a great event in the life of the church in 1910, and Brother Dow was invited to return and preach a dedication sermon. He preached Thursday night, Friday night, and Sunday morning, and each time large collections were received which helped to complete the payments on the organ.

Two other women's societies were active during those years — the Ladies Aid Society and the Rachel Circle. The former group did much informative work and fund-raising for Foreign Missions,

as well as "supervising the janitor at the request of the Church Board." The latter group was active in many fields. Their annual report for 1911 listed such diverse activities as "helping shut-ins, enrolling babies as little Light Bearers, sending dolls to India, and beginning our second hundred dollars for the Mountain Scholarship." In 1914 the president of this group was Miss Sara Hart.

Some time later the name of the group was changed to Rachel Missionary Circle, and more emphasis was given to sending supplies to foreign missions. Many years later the name was changed again, and the group was called the Sara Hart Circle in memory of the woman who eventually did become a missionary and whose devotion to all aspects of church work inspired so many others.

In the year of 1912 the Christian and Congregational churches made a determined effort to unite into one church. Committees were appointed by the Boards of both churches, and met, and carried on discussions. Their reports were all favorable. Disciples were reminded that Alexander Campbell had never seen his denomination as a separate one. He had written, "The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one." Apparently, however, the time was not ripe for this union of churches. No action followed the committee reports, and the matter was dropped.

Rev. Leach had resigned in 1908 and was followed by C. C. Rowlinson who came to the ministry after being President of Hiram College in Ohio. He maintained an efficient pastorate until October, 1913, when he was succeeded by Rev. F. S. Nichols, who served from 1913-1917.

Pledges were nearly always paid by the week, and for several years were collected faithfully, and sometimes personally, by the Treasurer, Mr. Guzman. The story goes that if a deacon was absent from Sunday morning service, the Treasurer might show up at his place of business on Monday morning and say, "I didn't see you at meeting yesterday, Brother ———. I've come for your pledge."



Finances became a time-consuming problem as church membership grew and church work expanded. The disbursements were many and varied, and the Church Board decided to hire a Financial Secretary. The Board specified that such a person should "have tact (and plenty of it), persistence and good judgment." This person was also to assist the pastor and do such other work as the pastor should deem necessary. In 1915 Miss Marjorie Pickering was hired for this post. Miss Pickering gave her financial report regularly, and she also reported that she was busy helping students—the first official reports of student work as such. She looked for homes where Christian Church students could live (there was very little dormitory space available then), helped them find jobs (50% of students worked part-time), and assisted in organizing church activities for them.

The unrest associated with World War I began to affect the church as early as 1916. Miss Pickering resigned to take a teaching position and was not replaced. Evening services were discontinued except for special occasions. The Sunday school was reorganized. A long-awaited Revival Meeting was canceled "because of the war", Rev. Nichols resigned, and there was a delay in finding a successor. In 1917 the choir was discontinued for the summer and some of the regular church activities faltered.

Church records for those years are not very detailed, and it is not clear exactly when the work was accomplished, but sometime during Rev. Nichols' ministry a one-story addition to the church was built at the back where the present education building stands. The addition included a large kitchen and several Sunday school rooms which were heated with coal-burning stoves.

#### 1918-1931

Rev. I. E. Wade came to the Christian church in August, 1917, and faced many problems during his first winter. Student work

was "much broken by war interference." Fuel was scarce, and, since the government stressed fuel conservation, the church was closed for the coldest six weeks of winter. During this time Sunday services were held in Macbride Auditorium in unison with other Protestant churches whose buildings also were closed. The women's groups canceled all their meetings for two months because of the flu epidemic of 1918. This virulent type of flu apparently was a greater health threat than we can easily imagine. On one day that winter an observer at the railroad station told of seeing 20 caskets of students being shipped home for burial.

An upswing for the church began the year after the war. There was an adequate building, able leadership from both the minister and laymen, and suitable funds for carrying out a varied program, as well as great challenges to meet. In addition to its regular giving in 1918, the Christian church gave to the Inter-Church World Movement, to Drake Bible College, and to the Armenian Orphans. They joined with other Protestant churches in sponsoring Sunday night services with special speakers for the youth of Iowa City. Some of the readers of this history may remember the unusual ecumenicity of those years when several hundred young people of the Christian church and others gathered at the big Methodist Church for emotionally-stirring services that concluded with hushed singing under a lighted cross.

No special changes marked the latter part of Mr. Wade's ministry of eight years. Rather there was a steady and gradual improvement in all aspects of church life. A Men's Bible Class was active in visiting at the hospitals and in seeking out strangers. The Sunday school received special focus once each year when everybody—over 300 pupils and teachers with the minister and his family and a photographer—trooped over to the university campus and lined up against the pale limestone walls of University Hall for a group photo. Besides the large Sunday school there were Junior Church Services and a full complement of youth group activities. One innovation was a sorority for university women, Kappa Beta, which was very popular.



In 1923 Rev. Wade's salary was raised from \$2,000 to \$2,500. Two years later, when he resigned, it was necessary to offer \$4,500 to attract a new minister. Rev. LeRoy Munyon was hired in 1925 and began his ministry on March 1 of that year. He was with the church for two years during which there were steady increases in attendance at church and Sunday school.

Two brand new problems arose at this time — a need for automobile parking space and an over-abundance of student worshippers. The first problem was solved by marking out "parking booths" at the rear of the church lot, but the other problem called for a big step forward. The university students needed space—for group meetings, for committees, for social affairs, for eating together, for just meeting each other. No place in the old church building really fitted their needs.

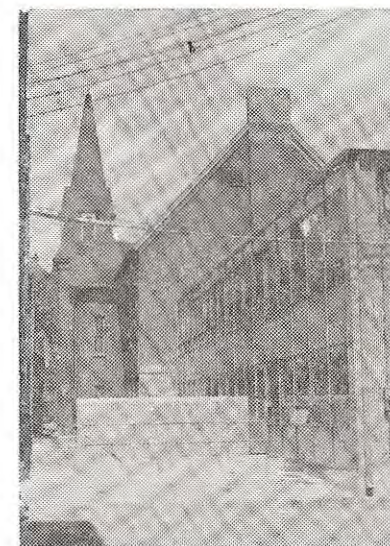
A temporary solution was to turn over to students the ground floor of the church. They had their own key which was kept at a nearby store so it was available to any of the groups at any time. Then the Church Board began to investigate the possibility of buying property adjacent to the sanctuary for a Student Center.

In 1925 a small hotel next to the church on the west was for sale for \$10,000. It was suitable for student use and the church was interested. However, debate over the price occupied the Church Board for several weeks. They finally empowered the trustees to make an offer of \$8,500, but the owners held out for \$9,000. While the Board was deliberating over this new price in January of 1926, their opportunity vanished. The hotel was sold to someone else.

Still in need of space in 1927, the Board considered the purchase of a small apartment house east of the church. Incidentally, this building had housed a commercial laundry for several years around 1900, giving authority to the statement by Christian church members, "In Iowa City cleanliness is next to godliness, and we can prove it."



CHURCH 1887-1967



EDUCATIONAL UNIT 1960



NEW CHURCH 1968



In case that purchase didn't work out, a committee was appointed at the same time to talk to an architect and get an estimate on building an addition behind the Sunday school rooms. For a very temporary solution the church rented two university class rooms to be used on Sundays by the student Sunday school classes.

In the meantime, other committees were meeting with Ames Christian Church people seeking ways to finance the student work at both institutions. Real interest was shown by the State Board, but at that time there was no formal machinery for making extra funds available for student work specifically. The Iowa Disciple Foundation and the State Committee for work in State School centers were contacted, but nothing definite was done.

Investigations and negotiations over both building and finances dragged on and on, and Rev. Munyon resigned in June, 1927, without any definite steps being taken to alleviate the inadequacies connected with student work.

Rev. Munyon's successor, Guy H. Findly, found that church finances and student work were still very pressing problems when he took up the pastorate in September, 1927. However, he had accepted a salary offer of \$3,000, somewhat lower than his predecessor's and with effort on his part and on the part of the Church Board and the Finance Committee, things began to look better. Early in 1928 good fortune also attended the church's search for additional space. The large house at 9 S. Linn Street, known as the Van Patten house, came up for sale. It was immediately bought by the church for \$6,250. It was in very good condition and was put to use right away for Sunday school classes, youth meetings, women's groups, Board meetings, chili suppers (all you could eat for 25c), and Boy Scout meetings. Occasionally the parlors were rented out at a nominal fee for such worthwhile activities as WCTU meetings and piano recitals.

The upper floor served as an apartment for the church janitor and his family. The only social event still held regularly in the social hall of the main building (the large room under the old sanctuary) was the monthly family-night dinner. The time for this particular social event, incidentally, has seldom changed since it was officially set at a board meeting in 1927. From the minutes of the October 3 meeting of that year: "Motion by Mrs. Rohrbacher, seconded by Miss Matilda Adams, that the last Thursday evening of each month be set aside as church night. Carried."

There was a feeling of general satisfaction with the progress of the church at this time. A typical comment comes from the conclusion of the 1928 annual report of the Church Board. "All topics discussed were for the betterment of the church so that it could be a greater influence in the community." The future looked bright.

There were seven women's groups listed in the annual reports during the 1920's. They were: The Ladies Aid Society, WMB Society, Pearre Division of the Missionary Society, Rachel Carrell Missionary Society, Sara Hart Missionary Circle, Triangle Girls, and Annette Circle. Membership varied from seven in the young girls' Annette Circle to over thirty in the WMB Society. Their goals varied, too, but the variation was mostly in emphasis, since they all worked for the good of the local church, and they all had an interest, large or small, in missionary work. Even the Annette Circle, with its seven members, was "supporting a little girl in India."

Rev. Findly's untimely death in January, 1931, caused the church work again to falter. Plans for redecorating the sanctuary and social hall were laid aside, and the search for a new minister was taken up once more. In a little less than seventy-five years, the church had had eighteen ministers.



### 1931-1947

In June, 1931, Rev. Caspar Garrigues came from Kansas City, with his wife and handsome college-age children, to begin his ministry. He had just concluded ten years of service as the executive secretary of the Missouri Christian Missionary Society. He could not know it, but the years ahead were to be difficult ones, for him, for the church, and for the country as a whole.

Churches, like many other institutions in the United States, suffered acutely from the financial crisis that followed the stock market crash of 1929. The Iowa City Christian church was very hard hit. In 1932 the local banks closed, putting the church on an almost day-to-day financial basis and entirely wiping out the treasuries of the Young People's Societies. During the next four years, the finances of the church were perpetually in a state of crisis. People had no way to pay their pledges, the Sunday offerings were very small, and there was nowhere to turn for money. The regular monthly bills many times simply could not be paid.

It is difficult today to realize that there was an actual shortage of money, of cash and coins, as well as a drastic reduction in all wages and other income. As one way of offsetting the lack of currency, some members of the church resorted to the barter system. Men did skilled carpenter and other repair work in the church and arranged to receive credit on their pledges instead of pay. Since there was no money to hire a janitor, church men and women took turns doing the janitor work and considered this a way of partially fulfilling their pledges. Payment for church music had to stop, and for two years the organist, choir director, and soloists were volunteers.

Late in 1932 a "committee on reduction of expenses" was appointed by the Board. Unfortunately, try as they might, they found few expenses that weren't already reduced. A small savings resulted from their decision to use mimeo bulletins instead

of printed ones. Every possible repair or improvement, of course, was put off indefinitely. Finally, it was necessary to mortgage the parsonage for money "to consolidate the bills". The minister's salary had drifted lower and lower—from \$3,000 to \$2,440 (of which he forgave \$400 unpaid at the end of 1933), to \$2,080 in 1934.

Finally, in 1935, the depression began to loosen its hold on the American economy, and the problems of the church eased a little. Talk of redecorating the sanctuary sprang up again, and that same year a successful campaign for "redecorating pledges" made it possible to carry out this project. The sanctuary was completely done over inside with Cellotex squares in shades of tan and brown, and there were other small improvements such as radiator covers and new lighting fixtures.

Church attendance, however, remained low in 1936-37, often falling below 100 at Sunday morning services. Average attendance at Board meetings was five to seven people, and one Board meeting was canceled when two persons were all that came. There seemed to be little enthusiasm for the program of the church.

Renewed financial pressures caused the church in November, 1936, to sell the Van Patten house, taking a slight loss over what they had paid seven years earlier. In addition, money had to be borrowed a little later for a new roof on the church building.

Support for the student work was sporadic, and specific goals for it were not yet determined. The Iowa Society of Christian Churches sent checks in varying amounts at irregular intervals "for student work," but there was no special committee designated to handle this money and no formal program for its use, and the money was usually put into the general fund.

March 27, 1938, marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Iowa City Christian church and the planned celebration seemed



to revive church spirit. First, the Sunday school rooms and the social hall, which hadn't been renovated in 1935, were cleaned and repainted. Then Rev. Garrigues planned a special eight-week series of sermons with topics ranging from "Our Beginnings" to "Why We Celebrate". Finally, came the events of Sunday, March 27, the climax of the celebration. The guest speaker that Sunday morning was Dr. Charles C. Morrison of Chicago, editor of *The Christian Century* and a fine speaker. Many visitors, including several former pastors, were present. There was special music at the morning service and in the evening a colorful historical pageant written by Professor Marcus Bach.

Rev. Garrigues announced his plans for retirement soon after the anniversary celebration in 1938. He was followed in the pulpit by Rev. John Dalton, who took up his ministry in March, 1939, at a salary of \$1,800 per year plus parsonage and retirement benefits. He was with the church for about two years before he was called to serve as a chaplain in the Navy in June of 1941. Under the circumstances he was given a year's leave of absence by the Board, and Raymond Ludwigson, a young minister, a bachelor, then studying at the University of Iowa's School of Religion, was named to fill the pulpit during Rev. Dalton's absence.

Rev. Ludwigson's scholarly interest in Bible study created new interest in adult study activities. The adult Sunday school classes were revitalized, and the Wednesday night prayer meetings which he instituted attracted many alert and interested worshipers. Old Testament study became popular also in several of the church women's groups.

Attendance at all church activities was high and a certain enthusiasm was evident in many areas of the work. In part, this was characteristic of a wartime (World War II) awareness of all things religious, and in part it was the result of one of those unexplained surges of interest that give any church's historical life

its ups and downs. However, Rev. Ludwigson did instill a deep feeling of responsibility and mission in his church people. This was evident, for example, at the pledging dinner in 1942 when he "stressed the importance and stability of the church in a changing and distressed world."

Although the second World War did not work the hardship on churches that the first one had, some little problems arose. A special committee was appointed for "letter-writing to our soldiers." Special funds were voted for a service flag to be placed in the church along with an Honor Roll of service men from the membership. And do you remember "sugar rationing"? At one Board meeting a plea went out for donations to the church of extra ration coupons for sugar—the only grape juice obtainable for communion was unsweetened and very unpalatable.

Each summer during the 1940's and for some years afterward the Christian church voted to join with three of the larger Protestant churches in holding union services during the four or five Sundays of August when the majority of Iowa Citizens were gone on vacation. Each church took charge of one Sunday, and if there was a fifth Sunday they engaged an outside speaker. This plan freed ministers, organists and other church personnel for much-needed vacations in the summer. Originally, each church opened its own building on the Sunday it was responsible. Later it seemed more convenient to use the Methodist church building but still rotate the ministers and the responsibility. All those who took part seemed to welcome this touch of ecumenicity in a city where members of different churches were not always known to each other. However, the pattern of vacationing changed as the city changed; the churches grew and often had two or even three ministers to share the responsibility for preaching; and the August Union Services eventually became unnecessary and inappropriate. After 1958 they were abandoned, and each church made its own arrangements for the summer.



As far as we know Rev. Ludwigson was the only bachelor minister to serve the Iowa City Christian church, and he was not allowed to retain that status long. On April 30, 1944, he married one of his parishioners, Miss Charlotte Beiswanger, a teacher in the local high school. He was given "a day off to get married" by the Church Board and a big reception when he returned from the wedding. Also in 1944, he received his fourth academic degree, a Ph.D. from the University School of Religion. He could then, if he liked, have signed himself Carl Raymond Ludwigson B.A., B.D., T.S.M., Ph.D., and it was with much regret that the church learned that he was leaving. His earnest faith and his genuine concern for the people of his congregation, as well as his learning, had endeared him to all. He resigned shortly after his graduation to become a professor of theology at Wheaton College near Chicago—and the Church Board appointed a pulpit committee once again. The committee interviewed several applicants for the vacant position and finally chose Rev. Donovan Hart of Montezuma, Iowa.

Rev. Hart had been a versatile athlete and a very good one in high school and college. He had also done some professional boxing before he was converted and became a student at Drake University and Drake Divinity School. When he came to the Christian church in Iowa City, he brought with him some new religious approaches, especially to youth work, and a great deal of enthusiasm for the church. However, within a fairly short time he and a major part of the congregation became impatient with each other's ideas and unable to work together. In October, 1947, he presented his resignation. Unfortunately, hard feelings had arisen at certain points, and some members of the congregation preferred at this time to transfer their memberships to the Community Church established by Rev. Hart subsequent to his resignation.

## Chapter III – Years of Service

### 1948-1953

After an interim period during which Professor Frank Gardner of Drake University filled the pulpit, Rev. Leon England, with his family, came from Plainview, Texas, to serve the church. Rev. England was an experienced and capable preacher. Under his guidance the church revised its various programs, re-instituted regular pledging (which had become more than a year in arrears) and began a vigorous expansion of student work.

The post-war years brought a wave of national evangelism and of renewed vigor to the institutional church, along with some of the benefits of increasing prosperity. In the Iowa City Christian church this was evidenced by an increase in activities and services and a corresponding increase in budget. The minister's salary increased and there was also a fund from the Iowa State Missionary Society to pay an assistant for student work: Allon McGlothlan, Director, Bethany Fellowship Student Center. Students of that period were more mature and serious, but also more questioning, than students of a few years earlier. They were very receptive to the church's program of discussions, study, and informal meetings.

Under the expanded program, money was budgeted for a Sunday morning nursery, for coffee hour, flowers, pledging envelopes and campaign materials, and for the Men's Fellowship, all of which had lapsed during the previous three years. Young people going to church camp or Southeast Conference received financial assistance. Financial deficits seemed to be a thing of the past, and on March 3, 1949, the treasurer's report showed,



"No outstanding bills in my possession, \$2,000 deposited February 1."

It was helpful that the student work of the church was receiving good support from the following outside sources: (1) The State Foundation, (2) The National Office, (3) The Parent Plan (an innovation of Reverend England's whereby Christian parents of students in school here were invited to give to the Iowa City church as part of their regular giving program), (4) designated gifts from local members, and (5) 66⅔ percent of student pledge money.

The student group was large and dynamic. Besides their student fellowship program they were responsible for holding services at Oak Grove Christian, a tiny country church unable to find a minister. They were also the vital mainstay of the Forum Class, a unique organization of people young and old (ages 18-68), married and single, who met Sunday morning for study and Sunday evening for fun for many years. Attendance varied from fifteen to sixty, but a lively spirit was always evident.



**FORUM CLASS**

An 85th Anniversary celebration took place in March, 1948, with a special service, a large family-night dinner and some historical skits.

In 1949-50 studies were made of the women's organizations, and the Church Women's Fellowship (CWF) was created. The women's groups continued to meet monthly as separate units, but they also met jointly once a month for more inclusive fellowship and an expanding program of service.

The church took up a new responsibility in the community when the Iowa City Area Council of Churches was formed by more than 20 local Protestant churches in 1953. Their charter stated that the Council was to be a "free, local, independent and autonomous organization . . . whose purpose is to express our common loyalty to Jesus Christ and to extend the influence of his teachings." Delegates from the Christian church served on many of the Council's committees over the next few years. One very successful project sponsored by the Council was a Sunday-school teacher training program given on eight successive Monday nights every fall. The Christian church supplied teachers and materials several times, and always had some of their own teachers enrolled. The Council also was active in charity work, supplied members for community projects and in general served as a "liaison facility" between the churches and the community.

In July of 1953 Rev. England resigned to go into personal counseling service in California, and a member of the University of Iowa faculty, Rev. Cyrus Pangborn, was secured to conduct the church services on Sunday. He also took care of funerals when necessary, but was not usually available during the week.

The lay people of the church showed their real strength during this interim period, for the work of the church was carried forward with skill and enthusiasm. The Church Board handled regular business matters successfully; the Sunday school teachers worked together and kept attendance at a high level; the church women followed their customary study and service programs—only the student work seemed to lag.



In the 1950's student work everywhere was in a state of flux. The students of that decade seemed to be less interested in questioning life and demanding answers from religion than they were in establishing their place in the affluent society.

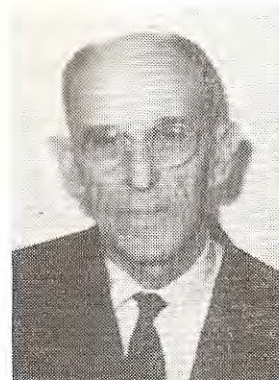
#### 1954-1960

When Rev. A. C. Hofrichter of Martinsburg, W. Va. came to the ministry of the Christian church in 1954, he was much concerned with this problem of student work, as well as with other complex problems of a fast-growing church. After some discussion at both the state and local levels, it was agreed that the time was right for an assistant pastor to join the church staff and help with the students and their programs. A search was begun for a person trained in religious education who could plan and supervise the church's student work and also assist with the Sunday school. Our church's traditional concern for the training of young people, and for the stimulation of adult religious thinking through the Sunday school program was unfaltering.

A well-qualified person to take charge of the Campus Ministry and the Christian Education program was soon found in Miss Sally A. Smith, who had graduated with a degree in Religious Education from the College of the Bible in Lexington, Kentucky. The State Board reinstated the student work funds, and a revised and much enlarged program for students was inaugurated. A new education building to replace the old and very inadequate Sunday school and student rooms was proposed, and a specific area for students—lounge, kitchenette, and study rooms—was incorporated into the plans.

An interesting innovation in the life of the church came about when the Board voted to create the office of "Elder Emeritus". This title was to be accorded to men who over the years

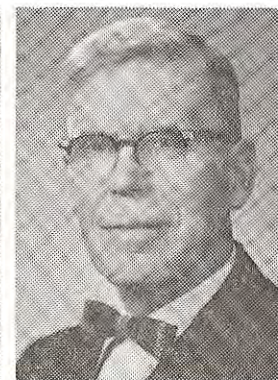
had served the church faithfully and well both as elders and in many other capacities, too. Up to this time three men have received the designation Elder Emeritus: Philip Norman, Elwin Shain, and Otis McKray.



Otis McKray



Elwin Shain



Philip Norman

Other facets of church life were expanding during these years. A concerted drive for 100 new members had almost reached its goal by 1956. A new system of committee responsibilities gave everyone an opportunity to serve in whatever area he chose, and created a new feeling of brotherhood and togetherness. The choir was outstanding for three years under the leadership of John VanNice who used a combination of humor and expert musical knowledge to coax Bach and Handel renditions from his volunteer group.

The Church Board "made haste slowly" with plans for the new building. A suggestion that the new church be built in a suburban location was carefully considered and rejected. Our present downtown location seemed best in terms of the varied needs of the congregation and the community. When the architect's drawings were ready, each room and area was discussed thoroughly in terms of usefulness and appropriateness. Financing was planned with the utmost care. The relation of the proposed



building to the second unit (new sanctuary) was kept in mind always.

Finally in 1959, the old back rooms with their linoleum floors and popping, leaky radiators were torn down, and construction started on the two-story educational unit. People were enthusiastic about the progress of the building and donated time and money generously. Much of the cabinet work and floor finishing was done by volunteers. Draperies and other accessories were carefully chosen and their installation supervised by committees of the women. The completed building was indeed one to be proud of. On Sunday, October 2, 1960, the \$110,000 building was dedicated at a very fine service attended by many out-of-town guests.

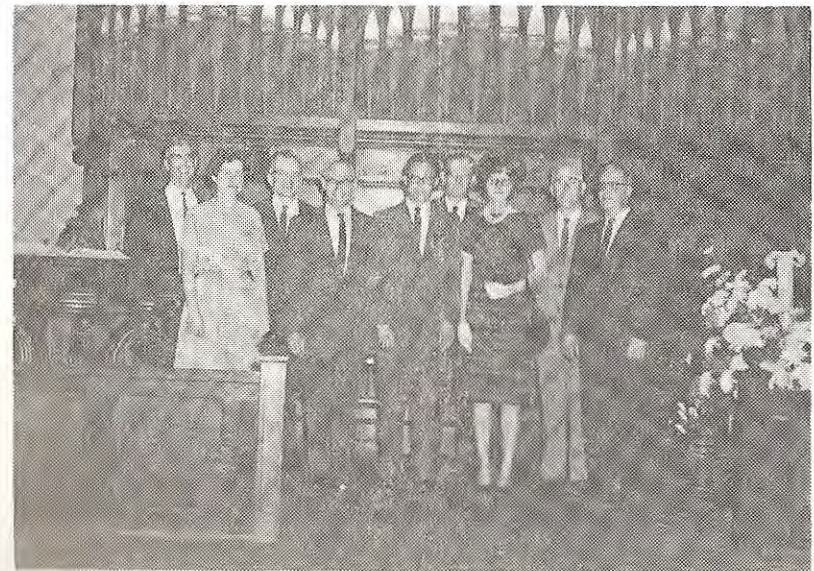
#### 1961-1963

Rev. Hofrichter resigned soon after the dedication to become the general representative of men's work for the United Christian Missionary Society in Indianapolis. The church had been fortunate in having his guidance during these years of expansion and change. His successor was the Rev. Spencer A. Adamson of San Antonio, Texas, who gladly took up where Rev. Hofrichter had left off.

The Sunday school was going well, reflecting the advantages of the new building. Student work under Sally Smith's able direction was attracting many of the Christian church members on campus. So Rev. Adamson and the Board turned their attention to the budget which was staggering a bit from the impact of inflation. The minister's starting salary was \$6,350 in 1961, and other expenses had risen proportionately. However, a campaign for more funds was successful, and attention was then turned to two other problems: (1) the church's need for unit two,

the new sanctuary, and (2) the celebration of the approaching Centennial Year, 1963. It was the Board's decision at this time that despite a leaky roof, peeling paint, and general shabbiness, the new building should wait a little until the education unit was more nearly paid for.

Great plans were made for the Centennial Year, the highlight of which would be a pageant depicting the history of the church. Sons and daughters of former pastors sent their reminiscences; older members contributed fascinating bits of data; some early furnishings of the church were collected; and costumes and hymn books of earlier days were unearthed from trunks. A most attractive plate decorated with a drawing of the church was ordered as a memento for church members to purchase. On the evening of March 28, 1963, the pageant was given in the sanctuary for



#### ORDINATION SERVICE

Front Row: Sally Smith, Rev. Loren Lair, Rev. Edward McLachlan, Mrs. McLachlan, Rev. Spencer Adamson.  
Back Row: Rev. A. C. Hofrichter, Prof. Richard Pope, Elwin Shain, Harold Hill.



an audience of nearly 300 people. Miss Sally Smith's script, based on the historical facts gathered during the Centennial Year, portrayed the highlights of the church's progress through 100 years of great change. On June 9 of that same year an ordination service was held in the church for Edward McLachlan, the first member of our local congregation to be ordained here.

With the closing of the year 1963, this Christian church completed one hundred years of ministry in Iowa City.

## ADDENDA

In 1964 the church suffered the loss through death of their much-beloved minister, Spencer Adamson. The work of the church moved at a slower pace for a while. Ronald Graham of Drake University took time from his busy schedule to fill the pulpit on Sundays and give counsel where he could until September, 1966, when Rev. Robert Welsh with his family came to minister to the church. He found the spirit good, but many things to be done. The old church building was finally torn down in May 1967, and "unit two", the new sanctuary for which so many had worked so long, began to take shape. We hope that, inspired by the new building and supported by the faith of our forbears, we can in the new century make our religion "as inspiring and intimate as love, as appealing as art, as intelligent as science, and as vital as the day's work."



Robert L. Welsh



Sally A. Smith



# MINISTERS OF THE IOWA CITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

1863-1864	Samuel Lowe
1864-1866	John Lowe
1866-1869	John C. Hay
1869-1870	Jesse Berry
1870-1872	J. Madison Williams
1872-1874	Rr. S. E. Pearre
1875-1882	W. Bayard Craig
1882-1884	O. P. Miller
1884-1887	F. B. Walker
1887-1889 (2nd term)	J. Madison Williams
1889-1892	M. S. Johnson
1892-1901	T. J. Dow
1901-1908	C. P. Leach
1908-1913	C. C. Rowlinson
1913-1917	F. S. Nichols
1917-1925	I. E. Wade
1925-1927	Le Roy Munyon
1927-1931	Guy H. Findly
1931-1938	Caspar C. Garrigues
1939-1941	John Bruce Dalton
1941-1944	Raymond Ludwigson
1944-1947	Donovan G. Hart
1947-1948 (interim)	Frank L. Gardner
1948-1953	Leon C. England
1953-1954 (interim)	Cyrus Pangborn
1954-1959	Albert C. Hofrichter
1955-	Sally A. Smith
1960-1965	Spencer A. Adamson

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1966- Robert L. Welsh



