

17.

One Faith - Many Works

This chapter is a record of important activities, institutions, and programs of the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference. It is an account of how the conference churches and organizations have worked together to witness and serve as opportunities arose and conviction impelled.

Women's Sewing Circle and Missionary Work

As the church's charitable and missionary work grew, an important source of its support was found in the women's sewing circles and later missionary organizations. As early as 1898 the Orphans' Home at West Liberty received clothing and food from women of the Mahoning County churches. The following year saw a sewing circle organized by the women in the Allen County churches. In 1902 Smithville women and the New Stark congregation organized, as did also the women in Fulton County. South Union and Walnut Grove organized in 1906. Others to follow were the Sugarcreek Church in 1910, Elida in 1911, and Martin's Creek in 1911.

The occasion for these sewing circles is illustrated in the Oak Grove congregation in Wayne County. A member of this congregation, Anna V. Yoder, was a worker in the Canton Mission and was influential in starting the Oak Grove Sewing Circle in 1905 in order to furnish garments for needy persons in the city. This sewing circle also met at least once a year at the Old People's Home at Rittman and sewed for the inmates.

The South Union Sewing Circle at West Liberty was organized in January of 1906 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. A. Y. Hartzler and from the beginning was active in behalf of the orphanage in that community.

An important role of leadership in this movement was filled

by the widow of M. S. Steiner, Mrs. Clara Eby Steiner. From 1911 till 1926 when she resigned because of ill health, Mrs. Steiner took an active part in corresponding with Ohio sewing circles and in visiting them. In 1914, for example, she appealed to local circles for funds to buy a sewing machine for the Mennonite Sanitarium at La Junta, Colorado, and for bedspreads for the orphanage at West Liberty.

A general meeting of sewing circle leaders was held at Wauseon, Ohio, in August 1915. At another similar meeting in 1916 at West Liberty, Ohio, the following officers were elected: Mary Burkhard, president; Clara Eby Steiner, secretary; and Ruth Yoder, treasurer.

At the General Conference of 1915 an overall organization was projected which included women representatives from nearly every state and conference of the Mennonite Church. As time went on, the organization, later called the Women's Missionary Society, supported missionaries in India as well as projects in the United States. During World War I much sewing was done for war sufferers. Despite some reluctance on the part of church leaders regarding a women's organization, the society grew. In all these years Mrs. Steiner played an important part in gathering data, issuing a *Monthly Letter*, and keeping up correspondence.

After 1918 the Ohio Women's and Girls' Missionary Society met annually to promote charitable and missionary activity. The society was made up of many local units, nearly every congregation having one. There were district meetings of the society, which on some occasions had between 600 and 700 women in attendance. Local units of the society prepared Christmas bundles for city and foreign missions. They gathered and repaired clothing for foreign relief and supported missionaries and the church's missionary activities.

Since affiliating with the Women's Missionary and Service Auxiliary of the General Mission Board of the Mennonite Church in 1955 the local groups are known as WMSA units. The work of the WMSA has since gone beyond supplying clothing and gifts of this kind. Mental hospitals and convalescent homes are visited and served according to patient needs. Local libraries receive gifts from the congregational WMSA units for the purchase of needed books. The *Ohio Evangel* reports in each issue the varied activities of the WMSA groups. These may include assistance to a needy family

in the neighborhood which has lost its home by fire. Or it may be furnishing supplies for kindergarten work with Mexican children in Texas.

Revival and Evangelistic Meetings

Revival meetings as a means of evangelizing, and as a means of building congregational life, have had a long history in the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference. As noted, John S. Coffman of Indiana was the pioneer evangelist in the nineteenth century. By 1900 this method was well established in the Mennonite Church, and in another twenty years or so it became customary for nearly each congregation to have a series of revival meetings annually. Ohio Conference churches have used this method extensively and with certain variations.

A study of conference records and congregations' activities reveals the names of many other evangelists who labored for days and weeks in local congregations. Among them were such persons as Noah Troyer of West Liberty, Enos F.

Hartzler of Marshallville, ii

Steiner of North Lima, William G. Detweiler of Smithville, D. D. Miller of Berlin, John S. Mast of Elverson, Pennsylvania, and Aaron Mast of Belleville, Pennsylvania.

B. B. King, formerly of West Liberty, Ohio, and C. F. Derstine of Kitchener, Ontario, were evangelists who held many meetings in Ohio churches during the 1920's and 1930's. Both of these men were experienced in city mission work and were frequently used in urban evangelism.

In 1951 George R. Brunk, Jr., held meetings at Orrville, Ohio, which attracted crowds numbering several thousand to the large tent which occupied part of a field near the town. ' Brunk held numerous revival meetings in Ohio churches, among them the West Liberty community in October 1953 and later among churches in Holmes and Fulton counties. The meetings were carefully planned, with numerous prayer groups and with publicity committees doing much of the preparatory work for the meetings.

As a result of the revival interest a new organization, the Christian Laymen's Tent Evangelism, was formed and in December 1952 held its first meeting at the Kidron Church, Kidron, Ohio. About one hundred and twenty members formed the organization which elected a board of trustees and engaged Howard

Hammer to serve as the evangelist. The organization sponsored evangelistic meetings not only in the Ohio churches but in other states. '

The Canton Bible School

Due largely to the vision and leadership of I. W. Royer and P. R. Lantz a Bible school was founded in 1912 at Canton, Ohio. Known as the Canton Bible School, its first session began on December 31, 1912, and lasted till February 7, 1913. Officers were I. W. Royer, principal, and P. R. Lantz, secretary; George M. Hostetler, Fannie Hershey, and J. S. Hartzler served as instructors. The school did not operate every year. No sessions were held in 1923 and 1924. O. N. Johns and I. W. Royer conducted the school in 1925 after which it was discontinued till 1938 when J. J. Hostetler revived it. In 1940 a six weeks' term was held from January 1 to February 9.' Leaders in the latter years included Harold E. Bauman, Ray Bair, Allen B. Ebersole, Kenneth G. Good, and Gerald C. Studer.' In 1957 the school closed in order to encourage the area churches to train their own teachers and workers.

The Canton School offered basic Bible courses, Mennonite history, and teaching methods. Students attending were usually young people who were active in their congregation's program of Christian education and youth work. Students came to Canton Bible School mostly from Ohio but some came from Pennsylvania and Iowa. The records of the school reflect social activities and recreation that made the few weeks bright periods in the memory of the young people who attended. A highlight of the school was often the Ministers' Week when ordained men from nearby churches attended a special week's sessions for Bible study and discussions on ministerial problems.

Camp Ebenezer

Among the activities of the Ohio Mennonite Mission Board in the late 1940's was the sponsoring of a camp program which served city Negro children. The idea originated in the mind of Tillie Yoder, a young lady who lived on a farm in Holmes County and who had taught at a Bible school in a Chicago Negro community. The camp program was definitely evangelistic in its intention. It was operated annually from 1947 to 1955 for Negro children from Youngstown and Chicago. After this the program became a part of an official

conference camping program at Camp Luz in Wayne County.'

Camp Ebenezer's importance lay in what it started by way of interest in a camp program for city children. Its importance also can be seen in that staff members of Camp Ebenezer later became active in missions in Negro communities in Cleveland, Ohio, and Saginaw, Michigan.

Camp Luz

The purchase and equipping of a camp for the Ohio Mennonite churches has as its forerunner the Young People's Institutes and the operation of Camp Ebenezer. It became clear that if such programs are to be operated by the church a definite location should be found for them. A search was made for a suitable site and finally grounds near Kidron, Ohio, were selected, purchased, and named Camp Luz. Camp Luz is operated by the Ohio Mennonite Camp Association which was founded in 1953. For some years Ira Amstutz was president of the board of trustees. Don Steiner now occupies this post.

Camp Luz, as noted elsewhere, serves many groups but it has one main purpose, that of promoting Christian growth, especially among youth. In the past it tended to serve mostly youth between seventeen and twenty-two years of age. It now appeals also to the nine-to-sixteen-year-old age-group. There are boys' camps, girls' camps, junior high camps, and youth camps. The camp is available for overnight retreats and serves for family reunions. In 1964 a total of 459 campers enjoyed the facilities of Camp Luz.

Mutual Aid Organizations and Insurance

In the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference there have been a number of mutual aid organizations which express the long tradition of concern which members have felt for each other's material welfare. One of these was known as the Amish Mutual Aid Plan." It was organized about 1857 by the Amish of the Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, area.

Previous to this organization the losses due to fire were made up by freewill offerings. The method apparently was not always a fair one, for losses were not evenly met in various cases. As a result a company was formed with power to tax and assess. The Millwood and Conestoga congregations were a part of this company.

In 1923 a reorganization took place and a new company known

as the Amish Mutual Fire Insurance Association was formed. By 1949 the total insurance in force exceeded \$8,000,000 and the company was licensed in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. The association includes not only persons of the eastern part of the Ohio Conference but also members of adjacent Mennonite conferences. The insurance policies cover farm buildings, dwellings, garages, churches, livestock, and farm machinery, with automobiles and trucks covered against fire and theft. Members of the board of directors give their services without any salary.

Another mutual aid organization is the Mennonite Mutual Insurance Company of

Ohio.⁹

Orrville, It was founded in 1895 by J.

M. Smucker, C. Z. Yoder (a prominent churchman), and Adam Martin. This organization provided economical insurance to members who had suffered loss due to fire. Originally intended for members of the local area, it grew to be statewide and served many Mennonite communities in Ohio. In its first fifty years it changed officers only a few times. J. M. Smucker was president for forty-four years and D. C. Hostetler was secretary-treasurer for forty-nine years.

Many of the Ohio and Eastern Conference members in Pennsylvania have been associated with the Goodville Mutual Casualty Company which dates from 1926.¹⁰ Located at Goodville, Pennsylvania, the company has provided an economic and efficient insurance service for automobile owners. Its program in recent years has extended into other states including Ohio.

Throughout the minutes of the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference there are frequent references to the prohibition of life insurance for the members. The major reason for this was simply the belief that it was the duty of the family and church to provide economic security for members of the brotherhood. If life insurance as it is commonly known were allowed, members would feel less responsibility for their fellow members. Few issues in the conference have been as problematic as this one.

Another argument advanced against ordinary life insurance was that it implied a trust in man and not in God. There was also the matter of being unequally yoked with "unbelievers." Others saw life insurance as merchandising in human life by putting a value on a person. Besides these arguments it was claimed that life insurance companies did not always meet their obligation or at least could not always help the most needy. The above objections were voiced in the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference churches

for generations. They were objections shared quite generally by sister conferences.

Intensive studies and lengthy reports to conference were made in order to keep intact the traditional brotherhood practice of caring for widows and needy families. However, the experience of the Ohio Conference has been similar to that of the entire Mennonite Church. As farming declined and as fewer people were living directly from the land, it became more and more difficult for the brotherhood to care for its members in need by traditional ways of congregational assistance.

Gradually throughout the Mennonite Church brotherly aid organizations developed and eventually these have become the means whereby many of the Ohio church members have provided for each other in times of need. These brotherly aid organizations usually have low costs and are also patronized because of their brotherhood aspects.

Ohio Conference members are now served largely by the organization, Mennonite Mutual Aid, which was established in 1945 by Mennonite General Conference as an Indiana corporation, sponsored by the Mennonite General Conference. Among its services are plans for sharing hospitalization costs, surgical, burial, and survivors' aid. Subsidiary organizations provide coverage for various kinds of automobile accidents. The Ohio Mennonite churches are represented in these organizations at the level of directorship and thousands of members benefit by their services.

World War II and New Fields of Service

The years of World War II differed from World War I in many ways for the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite churches. The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 provided for alternative service by conscientious objectors, and some of the lessons learned by both church and state from World War I were not forgotten. By and large the American public accepted the status and role of

conscientious objectors to war, and the willingness to render alternate service at no pay was respected. Local communities, with few exceptions, were not hostile to the conscientious objectors who resided in their midst and who engaged in some kind of service.

Young men who were drafted and who took the position of nonparticipation in war were assigned to work camps under civilian government agencies such as Soil Conservation Service, Forest

Service, and National Park Service. Later many were transferred to mental hospitals and training schools and public health centers. Of the nearly 12,000 men drafted in the United States into alternate service, 4,665, or 38 percent, were Mennonites." Of this number, 483 came from the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference churches. In all there were 732 young men from the conference who were drafted and of these, 187 accepted regular military service, while 62 received the I-A-O status or that of noncombatant military service. The percentage of men taking the traditional non-resistant stand of the Mennonite Church in the Ohio and Eastern Conference was 65.9 while the percentage for the Mennonite Church as a whole during World War II was 59.5.¹²

The expenses involved in the administration of Civilian Public Service (the official name for alternate service) were borne by the historic peace churches, the Society of Friends, the Church of the Brethren, and the Mennonites, as well as certain of the leading Protestant denominations. As stated above, the young men who were drafted worked without pay. Where families were involved, their support fell to local congregations or the entire brotherhood of congregations. The leaders of the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference were notably alert and active during the months and years of World War II. They sought humbly and sincerely to guide their congregations into ways of witness and service that were consistent with the gospel of peace as they understood it.¹² P. L. Frey of Fulton County, a conscientious objector in World War I, had administrative roles in the Civilian Public Service program and traveled widely during the war years. O. N. Johns of Stark County, a bishop, rendered important service as a counselor to young men and as a confidant to the state office of the Selective Service System. He represented large numbers of Mennonites to the government and in turn explained the government's role to draftees. On October 7, 1959, he was given a certificate of appreciation by the state director, Mr. Harold L. Hays, commending him for his actions which "have been conducted in a spirit of complete fairness to the individual registrants, to the Government, and to the other agencies or persons concerned."

The drafting of hundreds of young men from rural and small town communities, and their service in forests, mountains, hospitals, and health centers, was the beginning of new outlook and vision. The impress of this experience on the Ohio and Eastern churches

would be hard to measure and difficult to overstate." At the end of World War II scores of young men and young women entered foreign relief and reconstruction service under the Mennonite Central Committee. They served in Europe, the Middle East, India, and wherever the Mennonite Church's program of world service had openings."

Since not all men of draft age elected alternative service, the conference expressed concern about "those who erred" by entering the armed forces. In May of 1944 the conference passed a resolution which noted, with regret, "the failure on the part of some of our young men to be true," and "numbers of our people continue to be employed in defense and other questionable industries and to purchase war bonds in lieu of civilian bonds. . . ." The resolution then called for a program of teaching and counseling by the ministry of each local congregation to "establish" and "recover" the historic nonresistant faith and life of the church.

Much speculation has gone on as to why the lot of pacifist or nonresistant churches and individuals differed so markedly in World War II from that of World War I. Was it because of the general disillusionment that followed the Armistice of November 1918, a disillusionment that seemed to foster a peace movement, especially among the clergy? Was it because the drafted conscientious objectors were inducted into alternate service and so relieved the government (and the public) of much futile and unpleasant handling of nonconformists? Was there a difference in the social and intellectual climate of the nation so that civil liberties were regarded differently in World War II than in World War I? There seems to be no easy answer or explanation. Dr. Ray H. Abrams, a foremost authority on the domestic scene in the country during the two wars, notes the following in regard to the differences between World War I and World War II:

When compared with 1917-18, the population in World War II took the conflict and the horrors of war more in its stride. Twenty-four years before, there had been a great deal of hysteria. This time, while there was plenty of denunciation of the "Japs" and of Hitler *et al.*, far less real excitement prevailed. One heard and saw less of the wild-eyed patriot. The clergy in their utterances reflected the same differences.... The conscientious objectors were more highly regarded than in World War I, when they were damned or spurned by the clergy in general. No one knows how many preachers were pacifists, but they undoubtedly numbered several

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of the twenties and thirties carried right on through the war with remarkable strength. On this point Dr. F. Ernest Johnson comments: "The number of objectors has been extremely small in view of the strength of the pacifist movement, but they constitute a symbol of religious freedom, and the churches in general seem so to regard them."¹⁵

Disaster Service

One of the expressions of concern for the well-being of their fellowmen by Ohio Conference Mennonites has been the organization of Disaster Service units. The Eastern Ohio Mennonite Service was organized at Hartville, Ohio, on March 26, 1955, when seventy representatives from various branches of Mennonites from eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania gathered "to determine whether the Mennonites of this area should organize for relief and reconstruction, should disaster strike anywhere in our part of the state."¹⁶ The decision was made to organize, and a committee of five was chosen to proceed with plans. The committee consisted of George Falb, A. J. Miller, Abe J. Yoder, J. Elmer Witmer, and L. C. Kreider.

Other Disaster Service units are organized throughout the state. The Archbold community in Fulton County had been a leader in such a program before the Hartville meeting. The Disaster Service units render help in time of tornado disasters, floods, or similar catastrophes. They have also helped to rebuild bombed Negro churches and frequently cooperate with the Red Cross and similar groups.

Their organization is geographical, with contact men in each area who can be reached in case of a disaster, and who in turn can reach numbers of men who desire to serve in the emergency service.

Interest in Mental Health

The Mennonite Church acquired an interest in the relation of religion to mental health as a result of World War II when hundreds of its young men worked in state mental hospitals as an alternative to military service. Due to this interest five mental hospitals or psychiatric centers have been established by the church. The Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference has been active in supporting at least two of these centers. The Brook Lane Psychiatric Center of Hagerstown, Maryland, has been supported by

the eastern part of the conference since its beginning in 1948. In 1963 the Oaklawn Psychiatric Center at Elkhart, Indiana, was dedicated, and the Ohio churches have supported and patronized this center. The centers serve a clientele that is chiefly from outside the Mennonite Church. Their staffs of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and social workers, however, are available to ministers and laity of the supporting churches.

Youth Programs

Ohio Mennonite churches in the last several decades have had a splendid record of activities for young people. For some years literary societies in many of the congregations were an important type of youth activity. In 1932 the various literary societies formed a statewide organization meeting at the Dalton High School. Orris Yoder was elected as the first president."

During the 1930's Young People's Institutes were held in various places, the first being held at the Beech Church in Stark County." Leaders in this movement were I. W. Royer, O. N. Johns, and P. L. Frey. For some years YPI's were held at the Beech Church and also at Walnut Creek in Holmes County. From 1940 to 1947 a campsite at Sebring was the location for these institutes as well as Camp Zion located eight miles south of Canton.

Today the youth of the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference are nearly all a part of the churchwide Mennonite Youth Fellowship. Most of the congregations have their own organization of this movement which stresses Christian faith, practice, and fellowship.

The MYF's are more than merely gatherings of young people for social occasions. They engage in promoting the work of the church by distributing literature, making community surveys, visiting hospitals, helping to repair churches, and a host of other projects.

The youth program is integrated into the church by making it a part of the Ohio Mennonite Christian Workers' Conference. Two cabinets of young people are elected to carry on the work under conference sponsors. One cabinet serves the fellowships in Ohio and western Pennsylvania. The other cabinet serves the eastern Pennsylvania area. Conventions, workshops, and work camps as well as local meetings promote the goals of the Youth Fellowship. A news medium, *The Ohio and Eastern Voice of Youth Fellowship*,



Adriel School at West Liberty, Ohio

In 1957 the Adriel School, a residential institution for slow-learning teenage boys and girls, replaced the Mennonite Orphanage. The school is licensed by the Department of Public Welfare of the State of Ohio.

is issued quarterly and for the past decade has kept local units informed and alerted about the activities and goals of Mennonite Youth Fellowship. In 1966 James Helmuth was appointed as the conference youth worker with the responsibility of visiting congregations and to work with the local MYF's in their programs of spiritual life, witness, and service.

Scores of young people enter the Voluntary Service projects of the church. These projects may take them to a hospital in Puerto Rico, to a hostel in Japan, or to an agricultural unit in Nigeria. Others serve in city hospitals in Cleveland and other urban centers. A number work with handicapped children in the Adriel School (for retarded children) at West Liberty. This school is the successor to the Mennonite orphanage or children's home. Since 1957 it has served higher grade mentally retarded children and is operated under the Mennonite General Mission Board.

Some of the young men who elect the alternative to military service, called I-W service, work in hospitals as orderlies or as occupational therapists in mental hospitals. Orientation programs are sponsored by the conference to prepare the young men for this undertaking.

Central Christian High School

For some years there was a growing interest among Ohio Mennonite churches to establish a high school under the auspices of the church. In 1944 the question was raised in the conference, "Should there be a church-controlled high school within the Ohio district?" A study committee reported to the 1946 conference session on the question and in 1948 gave a more extended report.¹ Accreditation problems and prospects were explored in the same year.

Reasons for a church-controlled high school were advanced by its advocates, though it was recognized from the outset that not everyone would favor the venture. The reasons given were summarized in these words:

Our modern scientific and materialistic age endeavors to explain everything without God. True moral, ethical, and spiritual values are religious values. God is the ultimate sanction for moral and spiritual values in life. These cannot be taught without recognizing God as the living reality in every area of our lives-including education."²

In 1951 a committee consisting of J. J. Hostetler, Harold E. Bauman, Elmer Hilty, David Steiner, and M. L. Troyer submitted another report to the Ohio Mennonite Conference. The committee recommended a constitution for a Christian High School Board, also procedure for the election of a board, and outlined steps for developing a program for secondary education.³

Years of hard work and planning followed. A plant costing \$400,000 was envisioned. A campaign office was established in 1959 in Orrville under the name of Christian Schools, Inc., for solicitation of funds.⁴ Clayton L. Swartzentruber was designated as principal of the school and coordinator of the preliminary plans. Purposes of the new Christian high school were stated as:

1. To provide instruction of high academic quality which is totally Godcentered.
2. To provide an educational program that will foster an understanding of and appreciation for the Word of God.
3. To provide an educational program of high quality in a Christian environment that will prepare youth to make a worthy contribution to the cause of Christ in home, church, and community.
4. To provide educational facilities and staff that shall meet the required standards for accreditation in the state of Ohio.⁵

In the constitution of the school there was provision for an

Educational Policy Committee." A number of qualified persons were selected for this committee. M. O. Krabill, Charles Kreider, Roscoe Miller, Gerald C. Studer, and Clayton L. Swartzentruber comprised the committee which functioned to give guidance and counsel to the educational program of the school. All members of the committee either were public school teachers or were experienced in formulating educational policy.

Perhaps none of the Mennonite secondary schools were started with so much careful and dedicated effort. The clarifying of purpose, the formulating of policies, and the raising of funds finally led to the erection of a building for Central Christian High School, as the new institution was named. The location near Kidron, Ohio, in southern Wayne County placed it in a center of Mennonite population. Nearby are large and fertile farming areas and growing industrial enterprises. The high school was opened on September 5, 1961, with over 150 students.

By the fifth year, 1965-66, the enrollment had increased to 228 with a faculty of twelve. Six curriculums are offered: general, college preparatory, state board basic studies, business education, industrial arts, and home economics. The large auditorium of the school is not only used for school functions but also serves the community for annual high quality lecture-music series which feature noted speakers, musicians, and artists.



Central Christian High School

Since its founding in 1961 the Central Christian School at Kidron, Ohio, has been opened to about 225 students each year regardless of race, color, or creed. A board of directors representing the congregations of the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference operates the institution which is staffed by ten full-time faculty members and additional part-time teachers. Over 50 percent of its graduates attend college. The school serves as a community center for lectures and music programs.