

THE CHURCH THAT FRIENDS BUILT

85th Anniversary Celebration – 1926 – 2011

The First United Brethren Church of Parma Village – Organized April 4, 1926

The Rev. Carl Meinke had attended Sunday school at a small abandoned school house on State Road in Parma Village. Early in 1926 he informed conference superintendent Rev. E.F. Wegner of the availability of the building and invited him to come and see it. His idea was that it would be an excellent location for a new church. Wegner liked what he saw.

Accompanied by Wegner, a group of residents of the Village of Parma gathered on March 6, 1926 for the purpose of petitioning the Ohio German Conference of the United Brethren in Christ to organize in the vicinity of State Road, Parma Village, a local congregation according to the rules and regulations of the United Brethren in Christ Church.

After due consideration, prayer and consultation with the Conference Council of Administration, this group of friends gathered at building number 6 – the old school house – of the village school district.

This meeting of 26 people and Revs. Wegner and Meinke, organized the church on Easter Sunday, April 4, 1926. Rev. Meinke was selected to lead the church and later in the year was named its first pastor. On May 6th the first congregational meeting was held and 9 more people joined the church. With authority of the conference, Rev. Wegner signed papers to purchase the property from the school district. For a sum of \$4,575.00 the property and building at State and Forestwood was secured. On Palm Sunday, 1927, Rev. Meinke was succeeded by Rev. Harvey Hahn who became the second pastor.

The congregation of friends continued to grow and soon it was realized that the little old school house just wasn't big enough. Renovation of the building was deemed too costly, so it was decided that a new building would be built on the site. Concurrently the church was looking for a permanent pastor. Every now and then an organization makes a choice of leaders that brings to the fore someone who renders a significant service. Such was the case when in the fall of 1927 Rev. Harry C. Schiering was selected as the church's first resident pastor. The Schiering family moved to Parma from Indianapolis, Indiana in October 1927, and he would guide the church as pastor for 30 years and see the building through most of its expansion.

The close-knit congregation of friends committed to a \$45,000.00 mortgage for the new building. This was quite a commitment in faith for a congregation that barely numbered 100. Ground was broken July 28, 1929, and the corner stone was laid on October 6. The beautiful new building, consisting only of the sanctuary, the stage room and the kitchen, was completed the following year. As much as possible, the work was done by church members to save on costs. Because of this, when the building was dedicated on May 18, 1930, a new slogan "The church that friends built" was adopted by the congregation.

At the time of the dedication millions of local residents rode public transit. To encourage its continued use The Cleveland Railway Company erected a diamond shaped "Sunday Stop" sign directly in front of the new building. Transit service at the time was provided by a single track shuttle streetcar known as the State Road Dinky.

The new church had large doors facing State Road, but the main entrance to the church was in the bell tower. The church bell was secured from the Mt. Zion United Brethren Church near Marietta, Ohio, through the efforts of Dr. J.E. Comer, Conference Superintendent. Transportation for the bell and installation costs of \$37.61 were anticipated, but there was \$6.83 left over.

An organ loft was provided in the new building, but the desire to install an organ was frustrated by lack of funds. About that time Sarah Koch, a close friend of Rev. Schiering, gave him several coins wrapped in tissue, and with a tear in her eye said: "This money I found in my dear husband's trousers after he died." The money in the tissue amounted to 25 cents, but the lady had prayed and said "God will bless it." Three years later in 1933 the 25 cents was added to the \$6.83 left over from the bell fund, and this \$7.08 became the seed money to begin the organ fund. This was a conservative congregation!

Later the donors daughter, Gertrude Koch, both of Danville, Illinois, gave \$75.00 toward the organ fund. Because of the depression this fund did not come quickly or easily. Several years later the fund contained only \$207.18. However, two church members – Julia Pollock and Mrs. Henry Shermer – were steadfast in collecting money for the organ.

Five years later the organ was purchased from the Kilgen Organ Company in St. Louis. It had 246 pipes, three combinations: Great Organ, Swell Organ and Pedal Organ, with a two manual detached console. By the time of the formal dedication on September 18, 1938, the bill for the organ had been completely paid. The church that friends built had persevered.

On December 7, 1941 Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and the United States became involved in World War II. Shortly after the start of hostilities, the church began publication of a newsletter called Parma U.B. News. The staunch patriotism of the era was reflected in its pages. In addition to church news there was a column called Our Boys in Service that honored those serving in the military. The column began each issue with words from the Declaration of Independence: "That government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." Altogether, seven church members gave their lives in the war and one hundred four men from the church served in the armed forces.

During this era church membership had grown from the 26 charter members to 378, and had a Sunday school attendance of 240. At the top of a program for reception of new members early in 1942 was the following: "Dear Members & Friends: These are days for slogans. Everywhere we are greeted by signs – 'Buy Defense Bonds' – 'Keep 'em Flying' – 'Keep 'em Rolling.'" How would you like this one for the church? "Keep 'em Coming."

Between the dedication of the original building in 1930 and the war in 1941 was a continual, intense drive to pay off the mortgage. The church had drives, dinners and campaigns. It also sold things, presented plays, had concerts and socials to keep its membership focused on bringing down the debt. The effort paid off because on May 21, 1944, fourteen years later, a mortgage burning was held as part of the Anniversary of Dedication ceremony.

By the fall of 1949 church membership had reached 513 and church school attendance was 390 adults and children. Most church activities were held on Wednesdays and Sundays and all rooms were becoming overcrowded. It was again time for expansion. A booklet was printed and distributed that carried a very positive theme. A photograph showing the empty sanctuary was printed next to a picture of lots of people with the query 'Is this the church or is this the church?' Below it is a picture of the sanctuary brimming with people with the correct observation: **THIS** is the church!

Right around this time Rev. Schiering tapped the shoulder of member Jane French to be the first Director of Religious Education. She was on a leave from a local day care center at the time and had attended Western Reserve University while considering a career in early childhood education. She had great respect for Rev. Schiering and decided to take this opportunity.

As the first-ever Christian Education Director in the Ohio Conference, she set the stage for religious education. She organized the church school and wrote the curriculum, which became a guide for teachers church-wide. She held this position for 19 years and at the conclusion she was asked "What is Christian Education?" to which she replied: "I don't know, God is in charge of this". During her tenure the Sunday school classes grew and grew as the church expanded and expanded again.

The first building addition was to expand northward with two floors of classrooms, and this was known as the educational building. As before, the \$60,000.00 cost was contained because church members performed much of the work. Ground was broken for the construction on September 12, 1948 and the new wing was dedicated August 7, 1949. The add-on was of a slightly different architectural design than the original.

The war had been over for seven years, but there was great feeling within the congregation that a permanent memorial is established to both the one hundred four men who had served in the military and the seven who gave their lives in this great cause. It was decided that the new \$6,000.00 chancel be so dedicated.

The project included a remodeling of the front of the church to eliminate the doors, and alterations to the front of the sanctuary to make it less cluttered. This became called the Memorial Chancel, and the names of the seven members who gave their lives were engraved on a plaque which was placed at the front of the chancel.

The chancel was dedicated at a special service on March 8, 1953, and many of the 104 men who served their country were in attendance. The names of those who gave their lives are Albert Christ, Frank Glover, William Carlson, Lewis Balke, Donald Murphy, Charles T. Meyer and Charles Wells. This memorial plaque today resides in the narthex.

Parma was growing in the 1950s and so was the church. It was decided once again to add on to the church, and so a third floor was added to the Educational Building. In the campaign literature for the new addition it stated that "Dollars invested in church buildings bring dividends in the lives of people". A façade was added to the front of the north rooms that perfectly complemented the front of the original building. This very good-looking addition was dedicated on April 8, 1956. Once again church members gave of their talents to help save construction costs. In the dedication bulletin those who helped were "thanked for coming in nights to work on the construction".

In May 1958 Rev. Schiering and his wife Esther were honored in a special service for 30 years of exemplary service to the church. On March 1, 1960, Pastor Emeritus Schiering passed away at his retirement home in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. In 1967 another remodeling created the glass-enclosed Forestwood entrance and established the Schiering Parlor in its present location.

Probably the most prominent feature of the church is the stained glass window. The center pane shows Jesus dressed as the Good Shepherd and saying "Behold I stand at the door and knock." It is interesting to note that Jesus has been looking down upon us through this window since 1930. As beautiful as this was, however, the surrounding windows were of plain glass until November 1969.

The United Brethren Church merged with the Evangelical Church in November 1946, and the name became the Parma Evangelical United Brethren Church. A second merger was experienced with the United Methodist Church in 1968, and the Good Shepherd was selected as its symbol. The resulting name became the Good Shepherd United Methodist Church.

It was decided to convert the windows surrounding our savoir to stained glass, but styled in a more modern and futuristic manner so as to accent the original window. The new stained glass was installed as a living symbol to aid in worship. Some financial gifts were provided to cover the \$2,775.00 cost, and uniquely, all in the congregation had the opportunity to help choose the window design.

Over the next several decades the church continued to provide its services in a fast-growing community. During this era it was said that hundreds of people per week were moving into Parma, and the church that friends built continued to do its job. At the century's turn, however, winds of change were in the air.

In the younger emerging generation an entirely fresh context was being sought before the message of faith could shine clearly again. The sentiment to make a joyful noise unto the

Lord in a worship service was taking a different route. The style of free praise in worshipping the Lord took hold.

In our congregation plenty of care was required to blend the new thrust with the conservative base that had traditionally been with us. Steve Carpenter had been a featured soloist in the choir for some years. He stepped forward during 2008 to lead a new group of Praise Worshippers. One service a month was transformed from the traditional form of worship to a Praise Service.

Late in the year a leadership meeting was held and prayerfully asked for direction. From this came something to further God's mission and reach out to new people. In January 2009 Pastor Bob and members of the new Sunrise Praise Team took a huge leap of faith with the start of a weekly second service for Praising the Lord in song.

The most potent result of this very successful venture has been the drawing out of church members in an endless display of talent. People from both the traditional practice as well as the younger members have been stunned by the display of gifted persons guided in love by the Holy Spirit!

Indeed, the church that friends built is continuing to bring out the best that friends can offer. A new era is underway for one of the friendliest people oriented community churches that ever existed as Good Shepherd celebrates 85 years of service.

Good Shepherd United Methodist Church - Parma, Ohio