



1836

1961

# First Christian Church

Martinsville, Indiana



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THE YOUNG PEOPLES Bible Class of the First Christian Church of 1910 is shown in the picture which belongs to Mrs. Leonard Canatsey of 439 E. Jackson St. Left to right are: Front row—Raneous Baker, Cecil Monilelli, Eddie Baker, Glen Rankin, Bruce Culmer, Chancy Wilson, Paul Rawlins, Lewis DeTurk, Edda Brown, Walter Hanna, Harry Cure, Harold Dickson and S. C. Kivett. Second row: Clarence Prather, Harry McKee, unknown, Neal Prather, Will Fusleman, Clarence Kirk, Harold Isenhower,

Leonard Canatsey and Charles Kirk. Third row: Hattie Kirk, Mar (Hanna) Hurt, Minnie Canatsey, Mrs. C. W. Cauble, Eva Watson, unknown, Miss Clark, Dea Curr, Margaret Cohee, Tulie Isenhower, Dollie Baker and Mary Rudicel. Fourth row: Pearl Clark, Ora Martin, Isa Wilson, Mary Yeager, Bessie Wilson, Fern Briant, Isa Major, Mattie Kirk, Addie Rudicel, Myrtle Rawlins, Nora McClure, Grace Marshall, Edith DeTurk, Irene Cure, Emmett Parks and Veda Mannan.



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Written by MISS BEULAH HASTINGS  
for 125th Anniversary Year

## INTRODUCTION

According to Vere H. Rogers, in "A Short History of the Disciples of Christ," the religious movement known as "Disciples of Christ" or "Christian Church" started in America shortly after the American Revolution. Many Americans were seeking greater freedom in the field of religion. Nearly all religious groups in the 18th century had been transplanted from Europe. The beliefs and practices of some of these denominations placed great restrictions on their membership.

American Christians also wanted to do away with the sharply divided churches where members of different denominations were not allowed to worship together. Laborers were punished for working on a church that was not their own, and ministers were not allowed to listen to preachers of other communions.

In 1809, Thomas Campbell called together a group of Christians from a number of different denominations for worship and fellowship, forming "The Christian Association of Washington" (Washington County, Pennsylvania). They were trying to eliminate the divisions existing between the denominations. At their request, Thomas Campbell wrote and published a plea for Christian unity, "The Declaration and Address." Because they didn't want to start a new sect, they petitioned to join the Presbyterians but were not accepted. Then, a request to join the Baptists was approved and they were counted as part of them from 1813 until about 1830.

Alexander Campbell, son of Thomas Campbell, soon became leader of the unity movement. He was a most remarkable man who fearlessly sought the truth and sincerely felt that the unity of Christ's followers could be achieved by organizing the church on the simple plan and teachings of the New Testament. This idea appealed to many. Numbers of ministers accepted it and often entire congregations left their denominations to join the "Disciples," as Alexander Campbell called them. "Raccoon" John Smith of Kentucky and Walter Scott of Pennsylvania and Ohio, two great evangelists, joined the movement.

In 1803, Barton Stone, a Presbyterian minister in Kentucky, revolted against human authority in religious matters and formed a group known as "Christians." He, as a student, had thrown away



much of the ritual in the church and accepted Christ as Savior on the basis of simple New Testament teaching. The "Christians" with Stone and the "Disciples" with Campbell were very much alike in beliefs. In 1830, the two groups decided to join forces and most of the members agreed to the merger.

Preachers of the American Christian movement were an important part of the westward migration. Most of them were farmers and businessmen who had heard the "ancient gospel," received it, and wanted others to know of it, too. Thus, the growth of the Disciples was a part of the development of the West.

The present world membership is 2,016,086, and there are churches of the Disciples of Christ in 17 nations.

P. H. Welshimer in his "Facts Concerning the New Testament Church" gives the reason for the existence of the Disciples of Christ. He states the aims as follows:

1. The restoration of primitive Christianity and consequent followers of Christ in one body. (John 17-21.)
2. To exalt Christ above party and his word above all human creeds.
3. To build a church of Christ without denominational name, man-written creed, or other barrier to Christian unity, whose terms of fellowship shall be as broad as the conditions of salvation, and identical with them.
4. To lead sinners to Christ in the clear light of the New Testament teaching and example.

He further states, "On non-essentials we admit the largest liberty; on essentials we appeal to the New Testament. Where the Bible is silent, we are silent."

It is with this heritage that our own church began.

## MORGAN COUNTY

The part of Indiana that is now Morgan County was once the home of Miami Indians who knew the healing quality of the mineral springs here. Later it belonged to the Delaware Indians, who deeded it to the white people in 1818.

By an act of Legislature in 1821, Morgan County was set apart and a committee made up of John Borland, Monroe County; Thomas Beazly, Lawrence County; Phillip Hart, Owen County, and John Martin and John Maubrey of Washington County, was appointed to meet at the home of John Gray on March 1, 1822, to locate and

set stakes for the new county seat. Three sites were considered, but the present site of Martinsville was chosen. It has been suggested that the town may have been named for the John Martin on the committee. Joel Ferguson, John Gray, Joshua Taylor, Samuel Scott and Joseph Cutler each gave from 37½ to 40 acres to the town. By 1824, ten more families had joined the six families living here in 1822.

At this time there were many debates on what people were to believe and do in their religious life that were not mentioned in the gospel. Men debated at log rollings, house-raising and boat-turnings until work slowed. Women did better at quilting bees since they could work and talk at the same time. Men and women carried their Bibles and New Testaments with them at their daily work and at odd times searched the scriptures to prove their point. They all denounced fiddling and dancing.

One noted debate was between James C. Mathes, a Disciples minister, and Rev. James Scott, a Methodist. They discussed the respective tenets or fundamentals of their own beliefs. Settling nothing, the argument did serve to stimulate intelligent listeners into a deeper and more sincere search for truth.

Questions as to the actual date of the founding of the First Christian Church of Martinsville appear through various accounts. Whether the date be 1833, 1835, or 1836, as various accounts read, the date 1835 was placed on the cornerstone of the church when it was laid in 1891. According to the church history written by Elder N. J. Major, the church was organized in June, 1836, in the home of Perry M. Blankenship. Charter members were Appollas Hess, his wife and son; Benjamin Sweet and his wife, Harriett; P. M. Blankenship and his first wife; and James Jackson and his first wife, Pattie. Meeting at the home of Mr. Blankenship, they banded together as Christ's disciples to have no creed other than the Bible. Elder Joseph Faccett of Columbus probably officiated at the organization. The first elders were Mr. Sweet and Mr. Jackson. Mr. Blankenship became a member of the board, and Mr. Hess and his son were deacons. Louisa Olds was deaconess. New members joining were Mrs. Perminter M. Parks, Mrs. Patterson B. McCoy and Mrs. Robert McNaught.

For six years or more after its organization, the congregation gained few members. It probably did not have more than forty at any one time before 1842. In August of that year, Mr. Sweet organ-



ized a revival to be held in the old courthouse. Elder Andrew Prather was the evangelist. Many substantial citizens were added to the roll and from this time on the church took rank among the first in Martinsville. No regular pastor was employed, the elders filled the pulpit as best they could. Once each month preaching services were held for three days, starting on Friday evening and holding over to Sunday.

Soon after the 1842 revival, plans were laid to build a church. Mr. Sweet was the architect and head carpenter. William Newbern did the brick work and Elizah Harriman made the brick. Although the church fund was made payable in work or material for the building, funds were exhausted by the time the house was enclosed. But since the congregation had grown too large to use Blankenship's home or Tucker's cabinet shop, the members voted to move into the unfinished structure. Seats were formed of rough boards laid on cross supports. Little by little the building was finished. Today this old brick church on Pike Street forms a part of the rear of the Artesian Laundry. It was used for about fifty years.

About 1843, the church began to meet every other Sunday at the Major schoolhouse four miles north of town. The neighborhood contained many members at that time and many revivals were held there. In 1857, a small church was organized with most of the members coming from the Martinsville church. During the ten or twelve years of its existence, many were added from the surrounding county. At one time it numbered about sixty members. However, it was really a mission of Martinsville and was dissolved in 1876 and most of its members returned to town.

In 1850, Alexander Campbell visited Indiana. His visit was mentioned in the "Millenial Harbinger Magazine" of January and February, 1851. The account states that there was a well-packed crowd standing in the aisles and around the doors. The only room left was in the pulpit. Many babies in the congregation cried so loudly during Mr. Campbell's sermon that he sat down and his companion, a Mr. O'Kane, took over. After the babies had been quieted, Mr. Campbell tried again. However, he accepted defeat and brought his talk to a close as the children immediately started crying again.

In those days the elders of the church often did the preaching. In 1852, the church employed Elder P. M. Blankenship, who preached one week-end each month. This included two services on Saturday and two on Sunday. His payment was \$50 per year.

One of the many revivals held was especially successful, lasting seven weeks, in 1891. The regular pastor was W. B. J. Treat, and the evangelist was James Small. These services packed the church every night and added four hundred members to the roll. Shortly after this, the necessity of a new church became evident. The main auditorium and east Sunday School room were started in 1891 and were dedicated on April 24, 1892, by Elder Z. T. Sweeny. A Jubilee year was celebrated when the full cost of the building and furniture, \$16,080.72, was paid on May 27, 1899.

After this the church grew rapidly. During the ministry of Ray Montgomery, Sr. (1916-1925), the Bible school became so large that extra classes were held at the Public Library and City Hall. This situation revealed the need for an educational building. In 1928, during the ministry of Paul W. Boyer, a new building was constructed at a cost of \$50,000. The official board that sponsored the new building was composed of Charles Ellis, Charles Younger, Shelby Green, John W. Clark, Allen Moore, Lewis Williams, L. W. Jenkins, Roy E. Tilford, and Harry Cure. On June 3, 1928, a dedicatory service was held. Activities included Bible School at 9:30, morning worship service at 10:30, a fellowship service at 2:00 p.m. and the dedicatory service at 7:30 p.m. The dedicatory sermon, "A Perfect Day," was given by Rev. C. W. Cauble of Indianapolis, assisted by the pastor. Music was provided by the choir and orchestra, with Miss Iris Major at the organ and piano, and Mr. Charles Miller directing the orchestra.

## ORGANIZATIONS — MISSIONS

The missionary program has always been an important part of the church. The first missionary society was organized in June, 1839, with ten charter members. Before the depression of 1929, its members helped largely to support Rev. Frank Harnar as the living-link missionary in Africa.

Various missionary groups were formed through the years. Among these was the first Triangle Club, which was organized by Mrs. Roy Tilford in 1913 and later was sponsored by Mrs. Max Shireman. In 1923, another Triangle Club was organized by Mrs. Lola Knowlton with Mable Clarkson as president. This club was for girls and boys from age 15 to 18.

The Young Women's Missionary Circle started in 1914 with six charter members. The first officers were: Mary Yager, president;



Berl Summers, vice president; Dorothy Williams, secretary; Ethel Green, treasurer; Ruth Cure, corresponding secretary; and Mrs. Max Shireman, circle mother. In January 1923, young men were admitted to the Circle. The group began the support of Robert Ray Harnar, little son of the living-link missionary of the Martinsville Church.

The "I Tri" Club, organized February 3, 1928, was for boys and girls from 12 to 15 years of age. It was sponsored by Mrs. Ralph Goss. The same year the Young Matrons' Missionary Society was formed and the first officers were Mrs. Earl Knoy, president; Mrs. Shelby Green, vice-president; Miss Dorothy Williams, secretary; Mrs. Clarence Porter, treasurer; Helen McClanahan Miller, publicity chairman; and Ruth Abbott and Alice Swisher, group leaders. About ten years later, the Missionary Guild was started from former members of the Young Matrons' group. It, with the Missionary Society, lasted until June 1952. On that date, a Christian Women's Fellowship, which included all the women of the church, was set up. First officers were: Mrs. Emerson Laughner, president; Mrs. Frank Adams, vice-president; Mrs. Earl Knoy, treasurer; Mrs. James Koons, secretary; Mrs. Shelby Green, worship chairman; Mrs. George Perry, service chairman; and Mrs. Alva Meadows, study chairman. Officers were installed by Mrs. Ira Ennis. The group was divided into Circles I and II, and chairmen of these groups were Mrs. Leonard Lynch and Mrs. E. L. Thompson. There are now five circles. Each year they join the rest of the church in presenting gifts to the National Benevolent Association for our Christian Homes, the Christian World Fellowship Fund, Week of Compassion, Camp and Conference, help for training our youth, Indiana Christian Missionary Association, Campus Christians, Week-day Religious Education, International Convention, Community Chest, Unified Promotion, and Sunday School special day offerings including Thanksgiving, Easter, and Children's Day.

Under the sponsorship of C.W.F., the women of the church take part in many projects vital to the church. These projects include Women's Day in December, World Day of Prayer, in conjunction with other churches of the city; a Sacrificial Service prior to Easter; an annual Mother-Daughter banquet; help in Vacation Bible School; and many other service efforts. One of the latest of these activities is the attempt to lend a helping hand to the newest of our N.B.A. Homes, the Kennedy Memorial Home in Martinsville. This home was given to N.B.A. in 1957 by Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Kennedy in memory

of their son Charles. Present administrator of the Home is Dr. W. Dean Mason, and local church members, Kenneth Watson and John E. Hurt, are board members.

## SUNDAY SCHOOL

On September 23, 1843, a Sunday School was organized with Samuel Tucker as its first superintendent. In this first Sunday School, the New Testament and a few primers made up the entire literature of the school. Strong emphasis was placed on scripture memorization.

Through the years the Sunday School has grown and is now completely departmentalized to meet the need of all age groups. The present enrollment is 639. There are thirteen departments and thirty-one classes with forty to fifty teachers and officers. Graded literature is used throughout and a large percentage of this membership reads one or more church papers or magazines. Training schools are held at intervals to promote better teaching and administration of the church school. Regular reviews of needs and progress are made by the Christian Education Department of the church. The present officers are Morris Murphy, general superintendent, and James Koons, secretary.

Department superintendents are:

Junior — Mrs. John Finch.

Primary — Mrs. Steve Deatline and Mrs. Jackson Gray.

Kindergarten — Mrs. Richard Hanna.

Nursery — Mrs. Forest Brummett.

Other teachers in the present church school are:

Nursery — Mrs. William Neal and Mrs. Hubert McDaniel.

Kindergarten — Mrs. Richard Hanna, Mrs. Medford Williams, Mrs. Genevieve Kelso and Mrs. Richard Devoe.

Primary — Miss Margaret Rose, secretary; Mrs. Byron Baugh and Mrs. Emerson Laughner, 1st; Mrs. Bert Koons and Mrs. Don Green, 2nd; Mrs. Charles Primmer and Mrs. August Dilly, 3rd.

Juniors — H. E. Duncan and Mrs. William Redmond, 4th; Gordon Goss and Mrs. Dessie Burket, 5th; William Redmond and Mrs. H. E. Duncan, 6th.

Chi Rho — Richard Hanna, 7th; George Perry, 8th; Mrs. Kathryn Knoy, pianist.

C.Y.F. — Gary Wininger.



Young Christians — Rev. Ralph Spencer.

Ruth Circle — Mrs. David Harker.

Faith Circle — Mrs. Josephine Robinson and Mrs. Mamie Ennis.

College and Career — Mrs. Fred Sharp.

Crusaders — Mrs. W. Dean Mason and Mrs. Kenneth Watson.

Booster — Atly Routier and Earl Wilson.

Loyal Workers — Emerson Laughner and Mrs. Frank Scott.

An interesting fact is that Kirk Rawlins, cousin of James Koons, present church school secretary, was Sunday school secretary for twenty-seven years. Mr. Rawlins took over the position after the death of his father, who had held the same post for many years. He gave it up only when he and his family moved to Sheridan, Indiana. Other members of this family have put in many years of service in church school and have contributed greatly to the growth and progress of the church.

### ART SOCIETY

The Art Society was organized on January 21, 1888, when thirteen ladies of the church met at the home of Mrs. Laura Tilford. Their purpose was to promote the building of the new church and to raise funds to pay for the furnishings. By April 24, 1892, when the church was dedicated, they had raised \$1,200. They assisted with the furnishings and purchased the large window on the west side. In 1898, the Society united with the Aid, hoping they would raise more for the mortgage if they worked together. In 1908, it was deemed wise to start a younger woman's group, and a new Art Society began with the following charter members: Misses Leafy Dell Branch, Iris Major, Mary Yager, Ethel Kerr, Dee Cure, Edith Lockhart, Tulie Isenhower, Vida and Carrie Mannan, Gayle Robinson, Edna Henry, and Mesdames Joe Sadler and Grace Brown. About 1918, they started a building fund and were able to pay \$2,000 on the lot for the educational building. They also pledged \$2,500 on the new building.

Through the years they have assisted with various projects. In 1948-49, for example, they gave \$100 to the Crusade for a Christian World, spent \$1,366.41 for carpeting and furnishings for the parlor, bought, with the Ruth Circle class, new light fixtures for the sanctuary, purchased eighteen new tables for the dining room, and se-

cured new dishes and glassware for the kitchen. During the same year they purchased new drapes for the baptistry.

The Society is still quite active. Present officers are: Mrs. Thomas Mosier, president; Mrs. Claude Cohee, first vice-president; Mrs. R. R. Kinton, second vice-president; Mrs. James Scott, secretary; Mrs. June Cox, assistant secretary; Mrs. D. C. Baker, financial secretary; Mrs. Sarah Stanton, treasurer; Mrs. Maude Oldham, press secretary; Mrs. Ed Elliott, pianist; Mrs. Ed Baker, flowers, and Mrs. Sam Russell, cards.

### BOY SCOUTS

Early in 1928, the official board approved the formation of a Boy Scout Troop to be sponsored by the First Christian Church. Charles Ellis was appointed chairman of the Scout committee, and he secured Emerson Laughner as leader of the troop. Mr. Laughner appointed Wales Smith as his assistant. The troop began with fifteen members — Paul Maxwell,, Major Cohee, Merrill Cox, Aubrey Marshall, William Pringle, Farran Read, Joe Tilford, Lyman Abbott, Walter James, Keith Simons, Loran Scott, Merrill Frounfelter, Emmett Maxwell, Austin Kirk, and Edwin Carman. An Explorer Post, sponsored by the church, was established in 1949 and today there is also a Cub Scout Pack.

Through the years the number of Boy Scouts has grown until at present there are thirty-eight members. Nineteen members of the Post and Troop attend our church. They are: Gary Myers of the Flaming Arrow Patrol; Mike Redmond, Phil Cox, Richard Ely, Jeff Hahn, Pat Brown, and John Knoy of the Flying Eagle Patrol; James Cure, Tom Watson, and Curtis Dillon of the Rattlesnake Patrol; Albert Baughn, scribe and treasurer; Tim Watson, librarian; Raymon Kirk, Wallace LaMastus, Roger Coffin, Bernie Williams, Tony Cure, Steve Watson and Rick Thacker of the Post. The troop celebrated its 30th anniversary in September, 1959.

Present committee members are: Paul Myers, institutional representative; Albert Tousey, committee chairman; Dr. James A. Stieglitz, post adviser; William Redmond, scoutmaster; David Rowland, assistant scoutmaster; Fred Rutan, assistant scoutmaster; Wayne Pontius, cub scoutmaster, and Jack Burpo, Alfred Cox, Wallace Dillon, William James, Jr., Richard Williams, Dr. William P. Winter, William Cure, Robert Speelman, George Pearcy, Kenneth Watson, and Herman Thacker.



## THE OFFICIAL BOARD

Since the founding of the church, this board has grown from six members to its present membership of 18 elders, 48 deacons, 12 deaconesses and several ex-officio members. There are also three trustees.

About 1948, under the leadership of E. L. Thompson, minister at that time, functional departments were set up in the church. They consisted of Departments of Evangelism, Membership, Christian Education, Property, World Outreach, Worship and Devotion and Stewardship. These departments work together, holding a cabinet meeting of all chairmen once each month with the vice chairman of the board as presiding officer. Recommendations about various church projects and problems are discussed and presented to the official board for action, providing a more efficient program.

Present department chairmen are: Emerson Laughner, Stewardship; Maurice Davee, Community and Social Action; Ernest Hart, Worship and Devotion; Alva Meadows, Membership Development; Maurice Canatsey, Property; George Perry, Evangelism; Richard Hanna, Christian Education; and Mrs. James Koons, World Outreach. Board officers for 1960-61 are: Judge Robert Wade, chairman; William Hardy, vice-chairman; Josephine Murphy, clerk; Carl Brown, treasurer, and Mrs. Woodrow Goss, financial secretary. Mrs. Ernest Hart and Mrs. Herman Thacker are office secretaries.