

YOUR LINK TO GOD'S MOVEMENT

CHAPTER 1

GOD HAS FASHIONED HISTORY and has moved throughout history. In his story he has continually called people—both individuals and groups—to himself. When looking to our links to the past, we see his influence upon us. Gratefully and gladly we look to the life of Christ and the start of the Christian Church. We see a link to Jesus of Nazareth and to those who followed him and who follow him today. In every age many have discovered hope for daily living in the Nazarene.

God's Historical Movements

THE EVANGEL,¹ the message of redemption through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, continues as the foundation of the Evangelical Congregational Church. God has been shaping the Church from her start at Pentecost—when the Holy Spirit came upon the first Christians—and through the years of the early, medieval, and modern church. We have been shaped not only by Christ and the New Testament Church but also by movements in recent centuries, especially in Europe and America.²

THE REFORMATION

With our ancestry rooted in Europe, we see connection to the Church there as part of our heritage as a people of God. The Protestant Reformation ignited when Martin Luther posted 95 theses, or statements of protest, on the cathedral doors in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. In Europe and beyond, this and ensuing actions created new Christian groups called Protestants. (Previous Christian groups in Europe would today be comparable to Roman Catholics.)

The Reformation revitalized biblical concepts that had been losing ground:

- ◆ God's grace in salvation, which comes by faith alone;
- ◆ The Bible standing above all other traditions, writings, and rules and being translated and read in the language of the people; and
- ◆ The priesthood of all believers, that is, every Christian has access to God through Jesus Christ.

The Reformation had impacted many European settlers coming to North America. We, too, are heirs of this movement of God.

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1 *Evangel*, the root word of evangelical and evangelism, comes from a Greek word meaning “good news” and the “Gospel” of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the rendering of the Greek word *evangelion*, i.e., “good message.” Hence, the Gospel is the “Good News” of Jesus Christ! (See, for example, Matthew 4:23.)

2 See the pamphlet *Streams of Influence* where Bishop Michael Sigman (1999-2008) identified four movements called “streams of influence” that have shaped our denomination.

PIETISM AND PLURALISM

Pietism has influenced Protestant Christianity. Calling for true faith demonstrated in godly living. German Pietism, or simply Pietism, has spread widely to Christian groups such as Lutherans, Moravians, Brethren and others.

Many churches today share Pietistic qualities such as practical holiness, personal Bible study, the need for conscious conversion, devotional exercises, and an emphasis on spiritual experience more so than doctrine.³ Pietistic practices include the singing of hymns; the emphasis on foreign missions; the use of small group ministry, Bible study, and devotional literature; and help for the poor. Pietism upholds the toleration of other faith traditions and religions without compromising one's own. Within this conviction, the lifestyle of the pastors should match their preaching and teaching, while the people they serve should be involved in Christian ministries locally and beyond—even internationally.

Pluralism—the abundance and acceptance of many religions—has been accepted in America's religious landscape.⁴ Due to America's hallmark freedom of religion, numerous expressions of Christianity and other religions were transplanted or begun here throughout the U.S. history. In our land of opportunity, pluralism continues today.

Our American Story

WHEN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION severed ties between numerous American and European churches and denominations, the American church forged an identity all its own. The beginning of our church in the United States parallels the birth and rise of other American denominations.

Christianity grew quite listless during and after the Revolution. Most American colonists went through the motions of religion. Religion had its forms in early America but the outworking of Christianity, the loving of one's faith, was lacking. Shallow personal experience in biblical faith seemed to characterize not only immigrants from Germany but also those who were already church members here.

The religion imported from Europe lacked the experiential⁵ fervor that Evangelicals favored and nourished—"warm heart religion." During this time, a second widespread revival, the Second Great Awakening (1790-1825), stirred post-Revolutionary War America and helped to establish and vitalize the faith of our Evangelical forefathers.

Young Evangelicals in emerging denominations—United Brethren in Christ, Methodists, Presbyterians, Moravians, and Baptists—were soon joined by "Albright's People" in the revival.

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- 3 A special vocabulary, with words such as "new birth" and "regeneration," developed within Pietism. This jargon remains in use among many evangelical churches.
- 4 Pluralism is the situation in society where various and even diverse religions, develop and coexist. Roman Catholic priests came to America with Columbus in 1492, and Anglican clergy arrived with the Jamestown settlers in 1607. Dutch Reformed, Swedish Lutherans, English Puritans and Quakers, Scotch Presbyterians, and Germans of various sects followed.
- 5 Experiential means that which is related to or derived from experience. Evangelicals emphasize salvation through the experience of a personal encounter and acceptance of Jesus Christ and his claims. Experiential differs from emotional, which is related to feelings.

JACOB ALBRIGHT, OUR FOUNDING FATHER

Like the early church fathers in the first centuries of the Church and the founding fathers of America, Jacob Albright (1759-1808) is considered our founding father. He emerged as a leader among the itinerant⁶ lay preachers who stirred both German speaking and English speaking citizens and settlers in Pennsylvania.

As a second-generation American, Albright embraced an experiential faith emphasized in revival or renewal experiences. His grandparents (the Albrechts) came to Philadelphia from Germany in 1732 when his father was sixteen. As one of nine children, Jacob helped his father on the family farm in southeastern Pennsylvania.

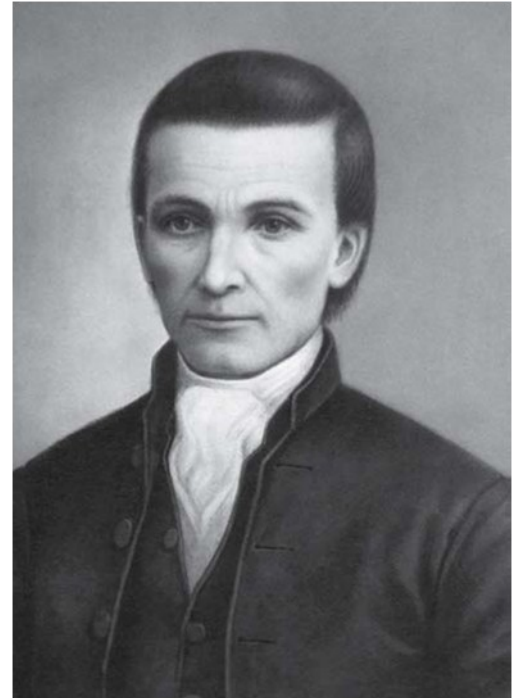
After serving as a drummer in the Revolutionary War, Albright married Catharine Cope in 1785. They settled in northern Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where he became a farmer and tiler⁷ and a member of the local Lutheran church.

Though successful in business, contentment eluded Albright. Family tragedy struck in 1790 as three of his children died from influenza. Rev. Anton Houtz,⁸ a popular evangelist of the German Reformed Church, led the funeral service. Albright sensed his spiritual plight, and in 1791, he wrote:

I not only realized my great sinfulness but the knowledge of my sin was followed by keen sorrow... I fell upon my knees, and tears of bitterness flowed down my cheeks, and a lengthy and fervent prayer ascended to the throne of God for grace and the remission of sins.⁹

As Jacob returned to his vocation, he engaged in spiritual struggles. Adam Reigel, whose farm adjoined Albright's and who later became a United Brethren lay minister, conversed with Albright at length regarding biblical issues. Fervent prayer paved the way for inner peace and salvation for, as Albright wrote, "One joyful experience followed another..."

At this point Methodism, an English movement, nurtured Albright's newfound faith.¹⁰ He blossomed in the Methodist class meeting led by another neighbor, Isaac Davis. Albright, the new Christian, praying in German among others praying in English, sought personal holiness, devotion, and a disciplined Christian lifestyle. Daily prayer brought rejoicing each day!



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- 6 *Itinerant* refers to one who travels from place to place, usually for business purposes. Itinerant ministers who traveled to preaching places were called circuit riders because they would often travel on horseback. In an Itinerant system for ministers, pastors travel to their assigned congregations. For the most part, the E.C. Church and its predecessor denominations have worked with itinerant systems.
 - 7 People referred to Albright as the "honest tiler." In addition to farming, he made tiles from the clay in soil in the area. These tiles were used like shingles.
 - 8 Anton Houtz and Henry Muhlenberg (who may have influenced Albright early in his life while at the New Hanover Lutheran Church near Pottstown, Pennsylvania), sent to America by Pietists in Halle, Germany, emphasized personal salvation and moral lifestyles.
 - 9 Terry M. Heisey, ed., *Evangelical from the Beginning* (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2006), 29.
 - 10 The Methodist Church, organized in America in 1784, also called for a personal experience of salvation, as well as following Bible doctrine and being loyal to fellow Christian believers. The Methodist class meeting, as developed by John Wesley, was the small group experience of past years. The atmosphere of the class meeting fostered

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Though confirmed in the Lutheran Church and stirred by a Reformed minister, Albright was converted and nourished in Methodist circles. He desired the discipline of sanctification¹¹ as formulated by John Wesley and the Methodists; his biographers attest to his desire to seek purity of heart and forgiveness from all known sin. In addition to the biblical doctrine and the evangelistic fervor of American Methodists, the emphasis on organization by the Methodists appealed to Albright. He mingled with them regularly, becoming a Methodist “exhorter.”¹²

Despite close ties with English-speaking Methodists, Albright soon broke rank with them to reach the ethnic Germans among whom he lived. Two related factors also influenced him: then language barrier and the Methodist leadership that chose not to pursue ministry to the German Americans. A traditional account relates that after spending a night with two Methodist bishops and sensing their position, Albright stated, “If there is no room in the Methodist Church to work in the German language and win the Pennsylvania Germans, I am going back to do that work.”¹³ God led Jacob Albright, a German-American farmer and tiler, to begin an early American ethnic ministry—a movement of God!

ALBRIGHT’S PASSION FOR HIS PEOPLE

Obedying Christ’s Great Commission has been held highly in our history, giving evangelism in doctrine and practice a central place in the Evangelical Congregational Church. Jacob Albright, seeing “fields white unto harvest” where he lived—among his German speaking neighbors—embarked on evangelistic trips in the fall of 1796, traveling to nearby counties where his “erring brothers” lived. By the spring of 1797, Albright expected to travel even into Maryland and Virginia to pursue German immigrants on their westward travels. By 1800 Albright’s trips—several weeks away from home—had taken him across the Susquehanna River into mideastern Pennsylvania.

Albright decided to organize his converts into the Methodist pattern of class meetings, which had nurtured him in the faith. With the formation of class meetings in three nearby counties in 1798, “Albright’s People” (“Albrecht’s Leute”) began. To be a follower of Albright meant to be out of the mainstream of respectable religious people. His followers were often harassed and mocked.

By 1803 class meeting members numbered 40; however, several hundred others in the areas visited by Albright responded to his preaching and also attended his “big meetings”—protracted meetings from Saturday through Sunday.¹⁴ Numbers of people were drawn to Albright’s Heartfelt preaching; however, a majority of them apparently felt that they could not join with Albright and remain respectable members of their churches.

11 Sanctification is a doctrine of theology. In the Bible, sanctification is related to being set apart as holy. For the Christian, to become sanctified means maturing in the ways of Jesus Christ. See Article of Faith 111—Of Sanctification, page 55.

12 The Methodist exhorter served as a lay pastor or lay preacher with a local group—the class meeting—rather than as a circuit rider who ministered to groups beyond his home area. Ministers often served as exhorters rather than circuit riders because they could not travel from their home area due to health or employment or family circumstances.

13 Albright, Raymond. *A History of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg: The Evangelical Press, 1956), 68-69. John Dreisbach, one of Albright’s immediate successors, experienced an encounter with a similar result in 1810.

14 Early circuit riders would enjoy local hospitality during the “big meetings.” In following years, these apparently evolved into quarterly meetings: four times each year the presiding elders (later, district superintendents) conducted business meetings on Fridays and Saturdays and officiated at Holy Communion services on Sundays.

The need for organizing Albright's expanding itinerant ministry led to a conference in a home on November 5, 1803. Albright gathered with John Walter and Abraham Liesser, his two assistants, and fourteen principal laymen. Five classes had formed with several prospective ones west of the Susquehanna River. After seven years of itinerant ministry, his followers ordained him.

A second conference met in another private home in the latter part of May 1806. This conference granted licenses to four "traveling" ministers and to three men in the newly created office of "local preacher." It was decided that similar conferences would convene every year, hence, annual conferences.

The first official annual conference met in the Samuel Becker home in Kleinfeltersville, Pennsylvania, from November 13 to 15, 1807. Though the members elected Albright as bishop, he had been informally serving in that capacity by "stationing" or assigning ministers to their circuits, the preaching places for his followers in given areas. The preaching places, of course, were homes, barns, street corners, groves, and other suitable places for gathering. The first church structure was built in 1816.

The 1807 annual conference adopted the name "The Newly Formed Methodist Conference" with an Episcopal form of church government.¹⁵ Their articles of faith and the rituals for baptism, marriage, burial, and the sacraments were borrowed from Wesley and the Anglican Church of England. Members in 1807 nearly doubled from the 120 total of the previous year.

A general meeting on Easter Day 1808 proved to be the last gathering of Albright with his fellow ministers. Perhaps this is the occasion referred to by a coworker who quotes Albright: "In all you do or intend to do, let it be by your aim to promote the honor and glory of God."¹⁶ One week later, from the vicinity of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, he began the trip to his home in a weakened condition. Sensing that he could not ride all the way home, Albright turned aside at the George Becker home in Kleinfeltersville where he died on May 18, 1808. Albright was buried two days later in the Becker family cemetery. Today the Albright Memorial Chapel stands nearby.



Albright Memorial Chapel

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THE LEADERS OF ALBRIGHT'S PEOPLE

Though Albright's opponents expected his movement to die with him, God raised up faithful leaders. People in many places who had personally discovered the heartfelt power of the Evangelical faith were seriously considering their commitments to the new movement. One coworker wrote of Albright's impassioned mission: "Whatever comes from the heart reaches the heart, and hence his hearers were usually touched that the seed of the Word did not fall among thorns, but bore precious fruit."¹⁷

15 In an Episcopal form of church government, bishops are entrusted and authorized as leaders.

16 Georg Miller, *Leben Erfahrung und Amtsführung Zweyer Evangelischer Prediger, Jacob Abrecht and Georg Miller*, quoted in R.W. Albright, *A History of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg: The Evangelical Press, 1956), 91.

17 *Ibid*, p. 88.

In keeping with Albright's vision from before his death in 1808 that God would raise up men to accomplish what he could not complete, three promising young leaders (with a combined age of 80) continued Albright's momentum: John Walter (1781-1811), George Miller (1774-1816), and John Dreisbach (1789-1871). The combination of the gifts and graces of these men solidified the foundation of the new movement.

The year 1806 proved to be fruitful as Miller led over one hundred people to salvation. On October 27 of that year, Miller, Albright, and Walter met for a "covenant service" in which they rededicated themselves to evangelism.

Annual conference did not meet in 1808 due to Albright's death. The annual conference of 1809 directed Dreisbach to publish a hymnal, which appeared in 1810 with 56 of Dreisbach's hymns.

Campmeetings soon became integral to the life of the young denomination. This American phenomenon began on the Kentucky frontier in 1800 as thousands retreated to the woods and pitched tents for series of evangelistic meetings. The 1810 annual conference planned two such events—the first German campmeetings ever! With four in 1814 and six the following year, camp meetings became ongoing opportunities for evangelism, revival, refreshment, and fellowship.

THE EVANGELICAL ASSOCIATION

By the first General Conference¹⁸ in 1816 one man's quest for his spiritually lost countrymen had become an established denomination with 1400 members in five states. The Evangelical Association¹⁹ had published its own *Discipline*,²⁰ hymnal, and catechism. The first church building was erected during these years, and Sunday School—a movement started as an outreach to children in England—became part of numerous gatherings as these new congregations organized. Ministers and new circuits were added as the movement carried the Gospel westward.

The Evangelical Association faced hard times in their first quarter century. Most ministers faced illness and strenuous working conditions with little pay, appreciation, and acceptance. Some showed indifference and disloyalty to their pastoral call and eventually were lost to the movement. Although the language barrier between German and English confounded the existing challenges, the Evangelical Association formed five annual conferences by mid-century, while advances such as new church buildings and denominational literature fueled the movement.

Whereas the Civil War seemed to thwart the larger evangelical movement in America, the Evangelical Association continued quite undaunted by this national dilemma. This developing denomination added fourteen more Annual Conferences, including the first ones outside America—in Germany and Canada.

18 *General Conference* usually refers to the meetings or the business sessions of the entity that represented and acted on behalf of the whole denomination, representing mostly by delegates from the Annual Conferences. See Terry Heisey, ed., *Evangelical from the Beginning* (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2006), 20.

19 *Evangelical Association* is a translation from the German of "Evangelische Gemeinschaft." The latter word also suggests "fellowship."

20 *Discipline* refers to the book that compiles the biblical and theological statements, creeds, practices, rites, etc. of a particular organized denomination or similar body.

Evangelical Growth and Change

OUR PREDECESSOR DENOMINATION evolved through the nineteenth century, looking quite different in 1890 than in 1800. Struggles for survival in the early years of the century were followed by later successes in numbers and advances in organization and institutions such as colleges, nursing homes and orphanages, and publishing houses. The phenomenal Christian Endeavor movement came alongside many churches late in the century.

But with the rapid growth came a growing difference in composition within the Evangelical Association. Fault lines began forming along certain issues. Although no one issue caused complete rupture, the intersection of several chaotic issues began to form into a critical division.

THE SCHISM OF THE EVANGELICAL ASSOCIATION

Geography played a significant role in the differences that arose within factions of the Evangelical Association. As immigrants (with their native viewpoints and experiences) joined settlers migrating westward into the prairie states, newcomers from Germany and Switzerland naturally gravitated toward the German-oriented Evangelical Association. Incidentally, the General Conference created three German speaking Conferences in 1875. During this emergence, the Midwestern faction of the Evangelical Association developed viewpoints different from their American born Eastern counterparts, mostly Pennsylvania German.

By this time, the growing Midwestern bloc of the Evangelical Association represented the *Majority*, which preferred a polity²¹ that characterized a strong central church government. The *Minority*, which was composed of the Easterners, was more progressive and democratic and favored a more representative form of polity. This group preferred that the regional Annual Conferences and congregations would hold more authority to govern their own church affairs. They also felt that, as the first Annual Conference, certain rights such as the right to assign the sessions of the General Conference were reserved for them.

Along with these differences, theological interpretations surrounding Christian Perfection²² and the preferences of speaking German or English language in the church became irritants within the debate. “What, shortly after the close of the Civil War, had begun as a theological debate between men of integrity and fine intellectual capacity denigrated during the next generation into a personal controversy between leaders of the church.”²³ At the forefront of this debate, two divergent personalities became the primary identities by which the sides would align. The Majority aligned itself with Bishop J.J. Esher and the Minority with Bishop R. Dubs. (The former thus became the “Esherites” and the latter “Dubsites.”)

The era of the Gay Nineties in America became a time of controversy for the Evangelical Association as numerous charges, accusations, and slanderous remarks were alleged against leaders and subsequent trials ensued. These events culminated in a devastating schism in the church.

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Raymond W. Albright



21 In this case, *polity* (not to be confused with *policy*) refers to a certain form of church administration or government.

22 See Article of Faith 111—*Of Sanctification*, page 55.

23 Raymond W. Albright, *A History of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg: The Evangelical Press, 1956), 326.

When the Majority and Minority factions met separately on the same day, October 1, 1891, each claimed to be the legitimate and legal General Conference of the Evangelical Association—and this pretense continued for some time. Each side denounced the other and brought charges against the opposing bishops. Later civil courts in various states, one by one, sided with the Majority, leaving the Minority without the property and buildings they had previously owned.

THE UNITED EVANGELICAL CHURCH

When the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled against the Minority on October 1, 1894, the East Pennsylvania Conference Minority met in Reading, Pennsylvania, to plan their future as a new denomination. Weeks later the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference organized as the United Evangelical Church. Eventually other conferences joined them, and remarkably the church recovered from the split and grew during a span of 28 years.

A general optimism at the start of the twentieth century reappeared after World War I, along with a desire that the heirs of Jacob Albright would be united once again. Some, perhaps more in the United Evangelical Church, thought that a larger denomination could better reach areas of America untouched by the Gospel.

The possibility of merger became reality within a few years when both General Conferences appointed commissions for merger in the latter years of the first decade, only to see them dwindle in 1911 and 1914. Despite this, they produced a “Basis of Union,” which was not accepted by the General Conference of the United Evangelical Church due to a lack of assurance for democratic provisions. But by 1919, they accepted the Basis of Union and many looked forward to 1922 for a special uniting conference. However, the delegates of the 1921 East Pennsylvania Conference did not fully endorse the reunion and desired that the Basis of Union be deferred.

In spite of the objection of Rev. E.S. Woodring, who presented six provisions against merger on behalf of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference delegates, the United Evangelical Church adopted the Basis of Union in 1922 and adjourned from sessions at Barrington, Illinois, to join the Evangelical Association General Conference in Detroit, which subsequently also endorsed the merger. Essentially two denominations had now become one. The previous arrangement between the conferences of the United Evangelical Church was dissolved in favor of reunion with the Evangelical Association.

THE EVANGELICAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH EMERGES (1922)

Those who did not join the merger felt compelled to uphold the ideals of Jacob Albright. The East Pennsylvania Conference of the United Evangelical Church championed lay rights and congregational autonomy—goals shared by others throughout both forerunner denominations but overshadowed and even obscured by numerous other issues and contentions.

The East Pennsylvania delegates rallied under the leadership of Bishop W.F. Heil. Representatives from 153 churches met to organize a new church conference on February 23, 1923, in Allentown, Pennsylvania. They endeavored to continue as United Evangelicals.

Not until 1927 did a court decision assure these congregations the right to exist as a legal entity and the right to own property. The name they chose was “Evangelical Congregational,” which retained the word “Evangelical” from the Evangelical Association and the United

Evangelical Church. The term “Congregational” recognized the realization of the goal to retain property rights by the local congregational membership.²⁴ Thus, another American denomination was officially born—the Evangelical Congregational Church.

When the dust had settled again, the E.C. Church had upheld Jacob Albright’s ideals for the Gospel and church organization. With gratitude to God, the E.C. Church expressed her values in a renewed version of the *Discipline* (which was patterned after the United Evangelical *Discipline*) with Articles of Faith, a more democratic church government, and a section of Christian Practice.

THE E.C. FORMATIVE YEARS (1922-1950)

Despite various challenges as a newer and smaller denomination, the E.C. Church proved resilient in rising as a full-fledged denomination and movement of God. The first two E.C. bishops, William Heil (1922-1926) and Edwin Woodring (1926-1934), led the church in these formative years. Bishop Heil provided the transitional bridge between the United Evangelical and E.C. denominations, serving as bishop consecutively from the former to the latter. During these early transitional years, Bishop Woodring founded the School of Methods—a youth instructional program that infused vitality into the future leadership of the church.

Church life held an important place for E.C. Church families in these years. Church services on Sunday mornings and evenings, as well as mid-week prayer meetings were spirited and largely informal. In the midst of this environment, the first hymnal was developed and published in 1931. The E.C. Church calendar observed special days derived for spiritual fervor in the life of the church—Rally Days in the spring and fall, Boys’ Day, Girls’ Day, Christian Endeavor Sunday, campmeetings, Vacation Bible Schools, and Harvest Home Sunday. Other celebrations also revolved around civic life, such as Mother’s Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Veteran’s Day.

Sunday Schools and Christian Endeavor societies were often organized into departments according to age and stage of life. Special evangelistic and revival meetings lasted for weeks when different traveling evangelists would visit. These evangelists would also come for “Decision Days” in Sunday School and encourage the children and youth of the Sunday School to make decisions for Christ.

The Annual Conference continued to be of great importance and interest to the congregations. During these years, pastors moved often, usually serving only a few years at a local church before moving to another assignment. Because of the proximity of smaller rural churches, many pastors received multichurch assignments as well.

THE ESTABLISHED E.C. CHURCH (1950-1972)

By 1950 the E.C. Church, confident in its doctrine and polity, took strides to further advance local congregations and denominational institutions. During these years, the E.C.

24 Bishop Edwin S. Woodring explains these terms in a 1930 address: “Two important ideas, which we have always stressed as a church, are linked together in a new name. One relates to doctrine and the other to polity. To doctrine we want men to know that we are ‘evangelical,’ as were our ‘Fathers,’ maintaining the Fundamental Faith of Protestantism in its simplicity and purity... In polity we proclaim the fact, in our name, that we are not an oligarchy; that authority is not vested in a few, but that authority and power must and does come from the congregations”; quoted in Terry M. Heisey, ed., *Evangelical from the Beginning* (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2006), 176.

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Church launched a major finance campaign, published its first catechism, founded a seminary, joined the National Association of Evangelicals, expanded the Church Home (named the E.C. Church Retirement Village in 1971), and began supervising missionaries directly (while continuing to cooperate with missions boards). Many local E.C. churches, which were now mandated to organize Official Boards, launched building or relocation projects.

In this decade the church created the Administrative Council to conduct business between sessions of the General Conference that met every four years, while local churches formed Pastoral Relations Committees. Christian camping relocated and resumed with renewed strength at Twin Pines Camp in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains. Yet the fervor that the American church had experienced began changing in the 1960s, even though membership and attendances in the E.C. Church peaked during this time.

Some other developments were disappointing as well. By 1970 the printing press operation had virtually folded, while two factors in Pennsylvania, one economic and the other demographic, impacted our churches during the middle to latter half of the twentieth century.

1. Decreased production of anthracite coal and the consequent population losses translated into membership losses in our churches in those areas.
2. Due to demographic changes, historically healthy urban congregations no longer remained neighborhood churches; members were often spread throughout the suburbs.

By 1972, her fiftieth anniversary, the E.C. Church had noted several additions—a place among America's evangelicals, a seminary and a nursing home facility, four E.C. foreign missions fields, nine thousand new members, and a net gain of twelve churches. During this same period, the E.C. Church considered new emerging challenges—a nation increasingly apathetic and antagonistic to church life and the gospel, changing demographics, and an interest in new structures to meet new demands.

The post-World War II years were prosperous for Americans who experienced a “Baby Boom” of births from 1946 to 1964. The start of many parachurch movements and voluntary organizations can be traced to this era—Youth for Christ (with Billy Graham), the Navigators, the Jesus People, and others (followed decades later by Focus on the Family, the Moral Majority, Promise Keepers, Women of Faith, and numerous others).

Churches prospered during these years as well. The E.C. Church grew numerically during the early years of this period, peaking in the 1960s, the decade when the significance of American institutions such as church and government was questioned. As a result, “subjective spirituality” and a range of newer possibilities for Christian expression (liturgical to contemporary to charismatic to various combinations) arose.

In our churches and throughout other evangelical churches, changes abounded. The church's youth were drawn to follow God's leading through new venues of communication—television, videos, Christian music festivals, and other forms of entertainment. During this time, evangelistic events and programs attracted the masses and featured TV evangelists and stadium crusades, while megachurches began to take shape in the American landscape. Social and political issues such as civil rights, the role of women, and abortion came onto the national scene and to the attention and mindset of Evangelicals. The Living Bible arrived in the late 1960s and numerous new translations and paraphrases have followed, even to this day. In many ways innovation had overcome tradition; cultural adaptability had won the day over traditional religion.

THE EXTENDED E.C. CHURCH (1972-2016)

Restructuring came initially in 1976 as the E.C. Church endeavored to move from a model of maintenance toward a model focused on outreach. The next decade brought organizational changes that impacted all our congregations.

Local church government had remained largely unchanged since the days of the U.E. Church. The Official Board model had served the local church well in maintaining localized ministry and in guarding church property, which were a response to the difficulties raised in the 1894 crisis. By 1978 the Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC), introduced by Bishop Harold Scanlin in 1963, was required in all churches to assist the pastor and the people in understanding their roles and expectations. In 1998, the E.C. Church approved the option of using a Ministry Council, an alternative governing structure that favored a ministry model form of governance.

Wide sweeping measures left virtually no corner of the E.C. Church untouched. Boards and agencies were revamped, eliminated, or consolidated. The 1979 Plan of Restructuring channeled societies into administrative divisions of the church. Church administration was streamlined and centralized at the E.C. Church Center in Myerstown, Pennsylvania. The Administrative Council, which conducted business between General Conference sessions, was reconstituted with larger roles for laity and local congregations. A new denominational administrator provided leadership for the areas of Christian education, church planting, property, and finances.

The leadership of the church, especially those in the office of bishop, extended the scope of the church in our present locales and in new fields at home and abroad. Bishop John Moyer's Vision 21 in 1986 focused on goals for increased church statistics—including church planting (Anglo and ethnic), pastors, attendances, and conversions. Later Bishop Michael Sigman's leadership during Vision 20/20 roused the church by developing new purpose, mission, and vision statements along with five core values.²⁵

The finances of the church were stretched and strained during these decades. Crises in cash flow were overcome but not without innovation and compassion through sacrificial giving. Bishop Richard Kohl led the church through lean times in terms of finances and ministers. On both counts, through God's grace and his people's generosity and action, finances were improved and all E.C. congregations received pastors.

By 1997, the 75th anniversary of the E.C. Church, the church had become less property-oriented and more ministry-focused. As a result, the church had become more proactive in meeting her challenges. Today the church focuses on themes of church health—vitality and effectiveness—as well as multiplication. Trust and cooperation have won the day in this part of God's family.

In early 2012 the National Ministry Team asked a vital question “What should we fund by mandate?” the “consumerism” or “individualism” that many noted in local congregations also became clearly evident in the relationship of local congregations toward the denomination. While the question asked by the NMT dealt primarily with financial structures, it soon became evident to Bishop Bruce Hill that the funding aspect of denominational life would need to be part of a comprehensive review and strategic plan of how we “do denomination” in the future. Bishop Hill formed a Futures Initiative Team to study how the denomination could creatively find other ways

25 See *Your Link to God's Larger Vision*, page 84.

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to “do denomination” in order to free up local monies for local ministries.

After three years of work the members of the National Conference adopted a “Covenant” which laid out the basis for a new structure for the E.C. Church. The new structure was developed around the mission of the church and replaced the traditional hierarchical structure with a structure based on the connectional relationships of congregations within districts, each led by a part-time District Field Director. In addition, five new “communities” were developed to provide encouragement and resources so local congregations can experience enhanced opportunities to bless the world through denomination connections and further enable the local church to fulfill its commission. The National Conference event moved from mostly business-focused to become an annual gathering where pastors and lay delegates could better spend time in worship, prayer, and educational opportunities.

The most recent decades have seen the E.C. Church extended—challenged in the ways she plans and conducts denominational and congregational affairs as well as how she lives the everyday Christian life. When resources have been stretched, the E.C. Church has forged ahead with new ideas, structures, and strategies at all levels of the church.

In recent decades the American church has experienced the decline of denominationalism but Evangelicalism has been rising! Many questions are being asked about the significance of the Christian Church, especially in the age of post-modernism.

In response to these questions, various new ideas and practices have stepped onto the American church scene. For example, consider the way Evangelicals worship: technology has impacted worship services as song lyrics, video clips, and sermon points are projected on screens. Many worship services have adopted a more informal tone in style of dress as well as allotting time for congregational greetings and prayer requests.

The church has begun to move out of the building as it attempts to fulfill the Great Commandments and Great Commission and impact the surrounding community. Numerous churches have started alternative worship services and fresh expressions of church for those who would not normally visit a church. Missional ministry, incarnational ministry; making a difference in the lives of people with the Good News about Jesus whether at school, work, or neighborhood are becoming important aspects in the life of the 21st Century church. Discipleship has deepened from simple Bible study to life-on-life disciple-making experiences as the goal has shifted from knowledge to life transformation.

From the humble beginnings of Albright’s people set in the pioneering culture of the early nineteenth century through decades of progress, development, and crisis, into the emergence of a new church and the formation of an organized body that has recently begun to utilize the tools of technology in order to reach new generations, the E.C. Church continues to advance. But most importantly, Evangelicals around the country and within the E.C. Church continue to live victoriously for Christ and his Church!

The E.C. Church continues to trust that God will faithfully lead new generations of people to develop new approaches to meet the challenges of our world as he did for our forerunners in the faith. As we present an unchanging gospel to a world whirling with change, we trust that God will raise up those who will lead the church. We agree with Jacob Albright, who toward the end of his days referred to his successors, saying, “Men will be called who will be able to accomplish what I am unable to do.”