

THE HISTORY OF THE  
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
OF MOREHEAD, KY

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KY History, Dr. Sprague

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The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination came from the collaboration of four men at the historical meeting at Cane Ridge. The men, Barton Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott,"<sup>1</sup> all had a Presbyterian background with different views of what religion should be. The main beliefs of the church were taken from Alexander Campbell whose concepts were "that every church should be autonomous and completely independent - that creeds, clerical titles, authority, and privilege had no justification in Scripture; that the Lord's Supper should be served at every Sunday service; and that baptism should be by immersion for adult believers."<sup>2</sup>

The name, Christian Church, was taken from Barton W. Stone who was "in favor of a church less complicated, less dedicated to the use of creeds as tests of belief and more open to the reunion of Christians."<sup>3</sup> The Disciples of Christ part of the name came from both Thomas and Alexander Campbell who felt the name was less arrogant and self-important than that of just Christian Church.

Between the years 1884 and 1887 there was a feud taking place in Rowan County. It was later called the Rowan County War. It was one of the most deadly feuds fought in Kentucky. As a direct result of this feud a "former Confederate General and a philanthropic Disciple,"<sup>4</sup> William Temple Withers, donated \$500 for the support of both a school and a church. He

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<sup>1</sup>Mead, Frank S. Handbook of Denominations in the United States. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980. p.75.

<sup>2</sup>Mead, Frank S. p. 76.

<sup>3</sup>Hamm, Richard L. Year Book & Directory of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) 1994. Indianapolis, Indiana: The Office of the General Minister and President, 1994. p.701.

<sup>4</sup>Madden-Grider, Fannie and Alvin. "Guns and Gospel." The Disciple. August 1985. p.29.

believed that the feud was occurring because of the lack of education and religion, so he agreed to give his support annually to help the citizens of Morehead.

Up until this time Morehead only had community church groups that rotated Sundays using the Court House as a meeting place.<sup>5</sup> "Dr. Guerant, a Presbyterian minister finally succeeded in persuading the people of the community to erect a union church building, in which at stated times, the various church groups might hold their services."<sup>6</sup> The Christian Church congregation finally purchased this union church building and they began having regular services but not always regular ministers.

The first four ministers of the Christian Church were traveling preachers who would alternate Sundays. They were S.B. Abrams, Rev. Yates, H. Minnich and John Marcum. They were only active pastors for a short while. In 1887 Rev. Frank C. Button and his mother Mrs. Phoebe Button came to Morehead to open the school established by General Withers. It was called the Morehead Normal School and opened with a total enrollment of one.<sup>7</sup> Along with teaching at the school Rev. Button became the first full time minister in 1887.

"For thirteen years the school and Church were supported to a large extent by the Kentucky Christian Missionary Society. In 1900, the Kentucky Society transferred its interest in the school and Church to the Christian

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<sup>5</sup>Jayne, Mary Alice. Personal Interview on April 15, 1995. She was born in 1913. Mary Alice has lived in Morehead all her life and grew up as an active member in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Morehead.

<sup>6</sup>A Brief Sketch of The First Christian Church. "A Brief Look at its History"

<sup>7</sup>Nickell, Elizabeth. The Morehead Christain Church ( A Brief History). June 13, 1943.

Woman's Board of Missions, a national organization of women of the Christian Church."<sup>8</sup>

During the 1920's the church had a large and very active young adult group that was called the Christian Endeavor (CE). There was also a younger group that was sponsored by the CE's that was named The Junior Christian Endeavor. These two groups met on Sunday evenings and their activities included bible studies as well as social outings such as: swimming, picnics and hiking. According to Hildreth Maggard, a life long member of the First Christian Church, Halloween and Valentine's Day were especially exciting for the church youth. They had costume parties and social gatherings which at the time were heated by four stoves in each corner of the little church.

It is a custom in the church to have communion every Sunday. During this time a woman by the name of Mary Carey would prepare the unleavened bread and the linens every Sunday and bring them from her home. She would then clean them and bring them back every Sunday. She was determined for this duty to be her sole responsibility and that no one would interfere.<sup>9</sup>

In 1920 W.S. Irvin became the church's minister. He was only the pastor for six years but under his leadership there were many changes for the Morehead Christian Church. During his ministry, the congregation decided to build a new church. They borrowed enough money to pay for the new church from the Christian Woman's Board of Missions and began it's construction in 1925. The first church was torn down and they began erecting the new one on almost the exact same site. While it was being built the church services were held in the Rowan County Courthouse that was just across the street.

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<sup>8</sup>Nickell, Elizabeth. p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>Jayne, Mary Alice (Personal Interview).

The new church was much larger than the first and it was often used for community events such as graduation ceremonies or social gatherings.

The church was now in debt and stayed that way for almost twenty years. In 1941 they burned the mortgage for the new church but did not have the ceremony until 1943 because of World War II. The pastor during this time was Reverend Arthur Landolt. Both he and his wife were "instrumental in involving our youth in becoming active in state wide youth camps and conferences."<sup>10</sup>

*per 7/8/95's  
because war  
extended through  
1945.*

During the years between 1943-1946, Charles Dietze was the minister. He seemed to have good attendance but this could have been because of the war and the happy end of the war. According to Mabel Reynolds, there were problems with the gas heating and there were a few church services held at the Breckenridge Building on Morehead State University's Campus.

The next major renovation of the church was not until 1971 under the leadership of Rev. Roy Roberson. During this renovation two sisters, Mayme Wiley and Ethel Patton, decided to take the burgundy velvet drape, that hung in the front of the church, to make into small pillows that were sold for keepsakes. The money earned from these sales went into the Christian Women's Fellowship, (CWF) treasury.<sup>11</sup>

Rev. Roy Roberson brought about many changes during his ministry. He was here from 1970 until 1984. He began the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. This has become a continuing event that is attended by people through out the community. He also organized a bell choir for children from

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<sup>10</sup>Reynolds, Mabel. Personal Interview on April 20, 1995. She has been an active member of the Christian Church for over 50 years and is also a Church Ambassador for the Christian Church Homes of Kentucky.

<sup>11</sup>Reynolds, Mabel. (Personal Interview).

the ages of 6 to 12. Before that only adults had played the bells, which were donated in memory of Jeff Calvert. Rev. Roberson also organized the Human Concerns Program. Through "this program our church would receive donations in the form of clothing, household items and also money, to help the needy in the Morehead area."<sup>12</sup> This program began in a small white building behind the church but has now moved to a joint effort with the Catholic Church and the Morehead Ministerial Association. Rev. Roberson was almost in charge of all activities. He lead the bell choir, youth groups, a Sunday School class, which was named after him, the choir and also was active in the community. During the time that Rev. Roberson was the minister, a Living Memorial Fund was set up by Randy C. Wells. This fund is set up so that someone may donate money in the memory of a loved one to be set aside from the regular church operating fund .

Before the current minister, Rev. Harold Tackett, came to Morehead the church had a parsonage available for the minister to live in. They sold the house and invested the money in a fund called the Inez Faith Humphrey Fund, with the interest to be used for emergency circumstances.

Rev. Tackett is the first preacher to bring in a youth minister. The youth ministers are students at the Lexington Theological Seminary and become a very active part of the church. Rev. Tackett also began weekly noon-time lunch Bible Studies. This has become a very popular event with the church members. He has also started an annual church picnic at the City Park. Rev. Tackett has been a Moderator of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Kentucky. He has lead the church in becoming more involved in outreach

*She was a part of this believe & write a book.*

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<sup>12</sup>Buckner, Anne. Personal Interview on April 17, 1995. She was born in 1946. Anne has been a life long member of the Morehead First Christian Church.

activities such as: helping with flood victims in the Midwest during the 1993 Flood and bringing a Bosnian family here to live as part of the Bosnian relief effort.

The role of women in the church is very important. They are elected to be deacons and elders of the church. They also are members of three very important circles. The Mary Carey Circle, Mayme Wiley Circle and the Phoebe Button Circle. These were at one time just numbered groups but over the years have been named after these three women. The Circles meet at different times (morning, noon and night), they do service work, study the bible and mission study. They also have made health kits and school kits for children living in third world countries.

Many things in the church have been given in memory of different individuals, such as the following: Stained glass windows, hymnals, bibles, organ, piano, cabinets, fern stands, a cross, candlestick holders, tapered candle holders, and the front doors. All of the preceding items are designated for whom they have been donated in memory of.

The membership of the church has fluctuated over the years due to wars and the different ministers at the time. The following is a list of the ministers, the years they served and the membership gained during their ministry (either by confession or transfer of membership):

<u>Minister</u>	<u>Years Served</u>	<u>Members Acquired</u>
F.C. Button	1887-1892	
Ralph Julian	1892-1895	
F.C. Button	1895-1901	
J.B. Dickson	1901-1903	
H.B. Wade	1903-1904	
D.G. Combs	1904-1906	

W.F. Smith	1906-1909	3
F.C. Button	1909-1911	25
George H. Farley	1911-1914	7
Wesley Hatcher	1914-1915	4
N. Carpenter	1915-1920	5
W.S. Irvin	1920-1926	28
C.B. Cloyd	1926-1930	16
Robert Riddell	1930-1932	3
Gilbert H. Fern	1933-1937	38
Arthur Landolt	1938-1943	97
Charles Dietze	1943-1946	46
Elmore Ryle	1947-1951	34
Miller Dungan	1951-1955	72
Ray Allen	1956-1960	108
C.L. Brooks	1961-1966	57
G.C. Banks	1966-1967	8
Alvin Busby	1967-1969	43
G.C. Banks	1969-1970	
Roy Roberson	1970-1984	236
Thomas Phelps	1984-1985 (Interim)	3
Harold Tackett	1985-Present	90

The First Christian Church of Morehead, Kentucky has been an important part of the community for many years. Unlike many churches there has not been any splits in the congregation of the church and it continues to be a united group of worshipers to the present day.

Source?  
No figures on total memberships?

Very good print

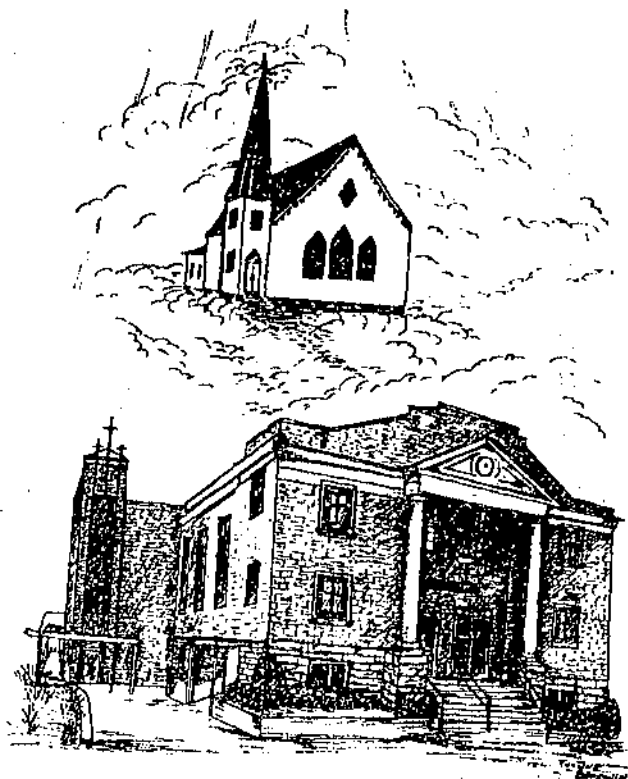




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Their undying interest and sacrificial loyalty to the Church over many years made possible the successes of the past and present.

First Church



Present Christian Church  
(painting by Yvonne Baldwin)