

History of the First Mennonite Church of McPherson, Kansas

The following resolution was adopted by the Western District Conference in 1937: Resolved: "That the Home Mission Committee make a survey of the Mennonite situation in and around McPherson and act on the findings regarding beginning work here as they see fit on the basis of this survey." Two Bethel College students made the survey and reported the results in 1938:

Against starting a church in McPherson:

1. Roads are good and people can drive long distances to their home churches.
2. The group in McPherson would be very diversified coming from different backgrounds and different churches. It would require all the grace, skill, and tact of a strong leader.
3. It would add to the increasing demands of the Home Mission Committee.

Positive for starting a church in McPherson:

1. Some people are driving 20-40 miles to church and some have difficulty finding transportation.
2. There is an actual demand for such a project.
3. It would meet the responsibility of the conference. Now some Mennonite families are joining other denominations and some don't attend church at all. At the same time, the conference is sending help to small groups far away.
4. McPherson is a potential and very promising field.

Five years later in 1943 a committee began organizing a fellowship. 45 people met on March 12 1944 in the basement of the Y.M.C.A., rent \$1.00/Sunday. The group voted to continue and an offering of \$6.96 was collected. A constitution was adopted in 1945. The name: The First Mennonite Church of McPherson. Charter members numbered 38. They joined the Western District Conference the next year 1946 and the General Conference in 1947.

In the summer of 1944 members met in McPherson College Chapel and then the Community Building. Two lots on East Kansas at Park Street were purchased for \$550 each, the site where the first church building was erected. During the latter part of 1945, after the war, building materials were hard to acquire. Members dismantled and moved two chapels from Camp Phillips near Salina for the wood used to build the church. Just before Christmas in 1946, members moved into the basement. Work on the building continued as finances permitted. Dedication occurred on Oct. 30, 1949. Cost estimate was \$15,000-\$20,000. Many churches and businesses contributed. One major fundraiser was Judge Walter A. Huxman of Topeka speaking in McPherson at a banquet which raised \$3,215 of the \$59,794.46 that was ultimately needed for the building project.

Home Mission Committee paid the minister's salary for five years until the congregation became entirely self-supporting. Rev. Roland R. Goering, just finishing his work at the Hartford Theological Seminary, was chosen as first minister serving ten years – 1945-1955. Rev. Henry Goossen served next five years - 1955-1960. Rev. Roland R. Goering and Rev. Henry Goossen served as president of the Western District Conference while they served here. Four ministers have been ordained in our church.

During the term of Rev. Curt Siemens, (1960-64), on January 29, 1963, two grade school boys, not from our group, apparently playing with matches, set the church on fire and the structure was completely ruined. Few things were salvaged. Mennonite Disaster Service came in to help clean up the ruins.

Church members met in nearby Santa Fe Grade School (January 1963-June 1964) until this building was erected on these nine acres, another venture of faith, a projected cost of \$100,000. Groundbreaking was Sept 29, 1963 and dedication a year later on September 6, 1964.

Early pastors who followed were
 Peter W. Goering, as interim September 1964- July 1965
 Arlin Claassen July 1965- June 1969
 Alvin Beachy interim, summer 1969
 Ernest Porzelius 8 years, September 1969- June 1977
 William Keeney interim, 1977-1978
 Allan F. Martin 3 years, August 1978- August 1981
 Edwin R. Stucky 5 years, December 1981- June 1986
 David L. Hall 3 years, August 1986- July 1989
 Louis Goertz interim, July-Sept 1989
 Don D. Nofziger 3 years, Oct. 1989-April 1992
 Ervey A. Unruh interim, Nov 1992-August 1993
 Mathew Swora 5 years September 1993- March 1998
 Edna Dyck interim, April 1998-August 1998
 Neil Amstutz 6 years, August 1998-2004,
 Len Wiebe interim, 2004-2006
 John Otto interim, few months in 2006
 Kathy Neufeld Dunn, June 2006 to present.



First *First Mennonite Church of McPherson* dedicated 1949, burned 1963

Pastor Kathy Neufeld Dunn was the first full time woman pastor here, installed in June, 2006. Pastor Kathy has been president of the McPherson Ministerial Alliance and serves on the Western District Leadership Commission and Great Plains Seminary Board of Directors.

Members here served in Civilian Public Service, PAX, Head Start Program, Teachers Abroad Program, I-W, and some in military service.

Early yearbooks report members serving in long and short term voluntary service, MDS, Meat Canning, MCC Sale, Mennonite Men's Chorus, Telephone Ministry, Food Bank, Aid to Refugees, help for the elderly, Memorial Home, Et Cetera Shop, Save and Share Shop, CROP Drives, Meals on Wheels, Friendship Meals, and others. Some members served in official positions in the Western District Conference.

In years past, youth group, Ladies Friendship Circle, Mennonite Men, and several choirs were active. Children's musicals were presented. Attending Camp Mennoscah was highly popular.

In 1986, 26 years ago, membership was 293. Since then membership has decreased to a normal Sunday morning attendance of 50-60.



Current First Mennonite Church of McPherson. dedicated September 6. 1964

Outreach efforts have been made to increase membership. A playground was added in 1986. The education committee added windows in classrooms with their Safe Sanctuaries policy. An elevator was installed. For more than eight years, we have invited the public to enjoy the 4th of July fireworks from our parking lot offering supper and now entertainment too. A fish fry has been a congregational fundraising and fun outreach project.

These days, members are busy with church activities. We serve venenike at the MCC sale. Quilters routinely sew a quilt for the Relief Sale. A Handbell choir enhances

worship. A worship team leads singing the first Sunday of each month incorporating more contemporary choruses. Members participate regularly in leadership roles in the worship service. Mark and Tami Stucky thrill the children with Bible stories using puppets.

Through God's leading and prayers from a congregational mission team, the ReUse It Center ministry opened its doors in McPherson in November 2011 with the purpose of collecting new and used donated building construction materials and selling them to anyone at reduced prices. Proceeds go to benefit McPherson County nonprofits and Mennonite Central Committee. Additionally, the mission was to learn to interact with people with needs and as good stewards to keep usable products out of the landfill. Many members have participated, and God has greatly blessed this effort.

Currently a visioning process is occurring where members are seeking God for a more complete call for this part of the Body of Christ. Despite our best efforts to be welcoming, our numbers have not increased, but God is teaching us about loving others, serving others, and learning to seek God for direction rather than making decisions our own way. We believe God is fashioning this people in a new way, leading us to take the Good News OUT of the church to where the real needs are, to connect and collaborate with others who are wanting to solve community problems, and to be ready to take risks in order that so many around us can learn also to love our Lord. Changes are difficult so we are trying to ready ourselves to be church in new ways.

First writing by John W. Goering 1985
Update in 2013 by Randy and Kathy Goering