

A Short History of the Church

*Founded as First Mennonite Church and
now called Burns Countryside Church*

Taken from the writings of Fred Gehring and Dave Stucky
Text compiled by Melanie Johnson & photos collected by Pastor Arlen Busenitz
(Updated 2013)

In the late 1930's and early 40's several Mennonite families settled in the Burns farming community. They were strangers to each other and at first they traveled back to their home churches, at least occasionally. That soon got tiresome, as it was too far to go and expensive, especially with tires being rationed at that time.

As time went on, these families became acquainted with each other and desired a place for Sunday School and Church Services near Burns. The Home Missions Board of the Western District Conference of the General Conference Mennonite Church was contacted, and in April 1941, some of their members came and met with some of the families.

Dan Gehring and I .G. Graves were appointed to find a suitable place, and they located the Crites School House, which was not in use at the time. It was rented for \$1.00 a Sunday. The Crites School House was located 3 miles west and 1/4 mile north of the present church. On June 15, 1941, they had their first Sunday School with an attendance of over forty.

On July, 20, 1941, Rev. Sam J. Goering brought the message at the first worship service to this group. Occasionally some from the Home Mission Board came and gave a sermon. Beginning in the fall of 1941, Bethel College supplied them with ministerial students, which they enjoyed very much.

In March of 1942, they were informed by the school board that they must discontinue holding services in the Crites school building. They felt defeated, but didn't give up. They decided to contact the school board of the Milton School House, which was located 3 miles north of the present church building. "It was somewhat smaller, but it served the purpose for some time. They did not charge us any rent, but furnished material such as shingles and paint, and we did the labor to fix up the building. We used it until June, 1946."¹

In May of 1944, the question came up in regard to organizing a church. A committee was appointed and with the help of the Home Mission Committee, a constitution was drawn up. After much discussion, it was adopted on June 16, 1944, with 30 charter members and named the First Mennonite Church of Burns.

Founding Members

Henry & Edna Goossen, Earnest & Ann Saner, Anton & Elizabeth Fast, Albert & Eva Hiebert, Raymond Hiebert, H.B. Sr. & Eva Schmidt, Fred & Helen Gehring, Joyce (Gehring) Kyle, H.B. Jr. & Esther Schmidt, John & Susie Schmidt, I.G. & Elsie Graves, Adolf & Ruth Schmidt, Sam & Florence Stucky, Pete & Ida Stucky, Silas Stucky, Esther (Stucky) Ott, Leta (Ott) Stucky, Wayne Ott.

This same year "the group requested that Henry Goossen, the student minister serving them at that time, be ordained as their minister." He was ordained at his home church in Nebraska, with some from the Burns church attending. Earlier in 1944 they had their first baptismal service, and in July, the first communion was held.

As the fellowship continued to grow, the need for their own place of worship became evident. Various meetings and

discussions followed. Fred Gehring wrote, "I felt most of us scarcely had enough money to buy a loaf of bread and to think about building a church! It's amazing how the Lord blesses when we work for His cause."

Plans were drawn up, Andrew Waltner donated 4 acres of land for a building site, the Home Mission Board approved a loan for \$8000, and a Head Carpenter, A. J. Frey of Newton, was employed. It was agreed "to have each member donate 8 hours each week and the hours we worked over that time we were eligible for 60c an hour pay....Sometimes I felt like the farming was neglected, but I personally don't regret one single hour that I donated."

Groundbreaking for the basement was November 1, 1945. Friends came from all over to help. On Dec. 30th the cornerstone was laid. June 2, 1946, the group met for the first time in the new church basement. Work continued until the church was finished and dedicated to the Lord on Nov. 23, 1947. "Thus saith the Lord...mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people." Is. 56:7



The total cost of the church up to the time of the dedication was \$13,704.94. Some, like Henry A. Goering, had loaned money without interest when times were difficult. John Gehring built and donated the pulpit. He also gave the evergreen trees around the place. The church decided to pay him 15c per tree, but he said, "No, if they grow, think of me."

Their first pastor, Henry Goossen, gave much courage to the others by his cheerful manner. He continued to serve until April 1950. Other pastors followed: Martin Classen 1950-53, Gerhard Peters 1953-59, Ted Roth 1959-67, William Regier 1967 -3 months, David Adrian 1967-69, T. A. van der Smitten 1969-71, Joe Chapman 1971-75, Abe Friesen 1975-77, Allen White 1978 -8 months, Harold Burkholder 1979-1989.



It was during the time Dr. Burkholder was here that the entry way and restrooms were added. "Also the ceiling fans, the loud speaker system, even air conditioning was added. Most importantly we accepted responsibility

to give partial support to

two missionary families, Dennis & Cindy Weins...and Dave and Eileen Barkman..."²

For two years Ben Friesen graciously served as an interim pastor. In 1991, Elmer Reimer came to serve us. In 1996, it was voted to break from the General Conference Mennonite Church. In 2000, the church added support to another missionary family, Rudi & Beth Fehr. In 2004 when Pastor Reimer left to devote his time to the Low German translation work, the church decided to support him in this endeavor. Pastor Arlen Busenitz was called to serve in 2004.

In 2011, as the sending church for Andy and Amber Hansen, we pledged their full support as they ministered at Beartooth Mountain Christian Ranch in Montana for one year. In 2012, we committed to monthly support for our youth fund to promote greater outreach to the youth in the Burns community. In 2013, we added support to another missionary couple, Cory and Leslie Young.

In 2013, after much thought, prayer and discussion, it was voted to change the name of the church from First Mennonite Church of Burns to Burns Countryside Church. The main reasons for the change were 1) To distance ourselves from the Mennonite churches which were moving away from our core beliefs 2) To better reflect who we are. 3) To enhance our ministry and outreach in the community.

Fred Gehring is the charter member in whose memory the stone in front of the church building was set. What he said is still as true today as it was when the church was built, "It's amazing how the Lord blesses when we work for His cause."



Article I—NAME

This church shall be known as the
"First Mennonite Church, Burns, Kansas."

Article II—PURPOSE

The purpose of this church shall be mutual edification and the promotion and advancement of the gospel of salvation as well as the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God at home and abroad.

The further purpose, in attaining these ends, is to cooperate with and support the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America and the Western District Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America in their activities.

Article III—CONFESSION

This church rests upon the only foundation and corner stone, which is Jesus Christ (I Cor. 3:11), recognizing and acknowledging the Holy Scriptures as the only infallible guide in Christian faith and conduct.

The church adheres to the Biblical teaching of baptism upon confession of faith; Holy Communion as a memorial of the suffering and death of Christ; the refusal to take oaths; Biblical non-resistance, avoiding affiliation with oath bound secret societies; and the exercising of a scriptural church discipline.

Article IV—MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. *Admission*

(a) Anyone may become a member of this church who has been baptized upon the confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and as his personal Savior; gives evidence of a Christian character; accepts and approves of the Articles of Faith and this constitution; and pledges to support all the principles and provisions thereof.

(b) Members from other churches wishing to unite with this church shall present a certificate of good standing in their home church. If no church letter can be obtained, they may be admitted upon a renewal of their profession of faith. In special cases the church retains the right of decision.

Section 2. *Duties and Privileges*

It shall be the duty of members:

(a) To have a mutual heartfelt love and an active interest in the spiritual salvation as well as physical wellbeing of all; to conscientiously use the means of grace and obedience to the precepts that the Lord as head of the church has given it. Especially is it the duty of every member regularly to attend the religious services arranged by the congregation and regularly to partake of the Lord's Supper.

(b) To conduct family worship in their

homes and to ask the blessing at meals. The parents are to be diligent in taking their children to the preaching services and Sunday School and when they have reached the proper age, to send them to the catechetical instructions.

(c) To contribute according to the measure of their temporal means to the general expenses of the church, to the care of the poor, to home and foreign missions and other projects of our Conference which further the Kingdom of God.

(d) To submit any possible difficulty with church members which they cannot individually solve to the Church Council before bringing it before the civil authorities. The church can only warn against going to law.

(e) To shun all oath bound secret societies as being contradictory to Christian principles. Anyone who joins a secret society thereby excludes himself from the church.

(f) To refrain from participating in warfare and settle difficulties by non-violent and peaceable methods, believing that love and good will, even toward an enemy, are required of a Christian.

(g) All members shall have equal interest in the property of the church. Those who leave the church either voluntarily or involuntarily, thereby forfeit their rights and interests in the same.

Article V—DISCIPLINE

Should a member bring reproach upon the name of Christ and the church by reason of unchristian conduct, as outlined in I Cor. 6:9-16 and in Gal. 5:18-21, faithful efforts shall be made by the church council to bring such a person to repentance and amendment. If these fail the church may, after due notice and hearing terminate such membership.

Should any unhappy difference arise between members, the aggrieved member shall follow in the spirit of Christ the rules given him in the 18th chapter of Matthew, and in I Cor. 6:1-8.

Any person whose membership has been terminated, may be restored by vote of the church at any time the evidence makes such action desirable.

Article VI—THE CHURCH COUNCIL

The church council consists of the minister, the deacon and the three members of the board of trustees.

It shall be the duty of the council to promote the spiritual welfare of the church; to supervise and regulate all the affairs of the same; to keep a careful watch over the moral and spiritual life of each individual member, to comfort, encourage, and admonish where necessary.

The council also has charge of the church building as well as other property

and shall decide upon any request for its use.

(a) *The Minister*

1. The gospel ministry shall be performed by the pastor, whose duty it shall be to preach the Word of God purely and clearly, to impart catechetical instruction, to solemnize marriages, to conduct funerals and visit the sick, as well as the church members in general. Baptism and communion services are duties of the minister and he shall also be councillor of all auxiliary organizations of the church.

2. The office of the ministry of the church shall be supplied by calling or election by a two-thirds majority of the eligible voters.

(b) *The Deacon*

It shall be the duty of the deacon to assist the minister in the spiritual service within the church; to make all preparations for and assist in the administering of the sacraments; look after the needs of the poor and the needy in the congregation, and receive and distribute as designated certain missionary funds and make a report of his work at the annual business meeting.

The deacon shall be elected for a term of three years but shall be eligible for re-election. He shall possess the qualifications set forth in I Tim. 3:8-13 and Acts 6:3.

(c) *Board of Trustees*

The board of trustees consists of three members, one being elected each year for a term of three years. There shall be a chairman, secretary, and treasurer who shall have charge of the church property and present a yearly budget at the annual meeting including a plan for the raising of the necessary funds.

It is the duty of the chairmen to preside at all business meetings of the church. He shall employ and supervise the necessary help for cleaning and maintaining the church building and grounds as well as the cemetery, keep a record of all burial places, appoint an auditing committee of two prior to the annual meeting and give a report of his work at the annual meeting.

The secretary shall keep a record of all church resolutions and do the necessary correspondence.

The treasurer shall receive all moneys for current expenses, pay all salaries and bills, and present a statement at the annual meeting.

Article VII—BAPTISM

Every person in so far as he or she has the necessary knowledge concerning redemptive truth, and testifies thereof in daily life, is to be admitted to baptism. The examination of such requirements is the duty of the minister, who instructs

and baptizes the candidates.

Baptism shall be preceded by instruction, the extent of which is determined by the minister. Candidates who in the opinion of the church council are not ready for admission may by the same be put on the waiting list.

This church recognizes the baptism of all who are baptized upon confession of faith, but practice only the mode of pouring.

Article VIII—COMMUNION

The Lord's Supper shall be observed at least twice a year. Reverent partaking of the same is the sacred duty of all Christians. In general all members of this church are admissible to the Lord's Supper. Members of other churches who wish to partake of the Lord's Supper with us should see the church council. The Lord's Supper should be preceded, if possible, by a service of preparation.

Article IX—HOLY MATRIMONY

Section 1. In view of the fact that matrimony is an ordinance of God, members entering into this state shall have the marriage ceremony performed by a minister of a church. Before the marriage the parties engaged shall be publicly announced in church and God's blessing asked upon their union.

Section 2. In a marriage occurring be-

tween one of our members and a member of another Christian denomination or sister church, we recommend and wish that the parties would join one and the same church as soon as possible, so as to better further the Christian life and education of self and children in this important and holy step.

Section 3. We consider it unbiblical according to II Cor. 6:14-16 and seriously warn against a member of our church marrying a party belonging to no Christian denomination. Should efforts fail to win the other party for our church our member excludes himself (or herself) from the church fellowship.

Section 4. We consider divorce unscriptural (Matt. 19:9). Members guilty of marrying divorced persons or of re-marrying when already divorced automatically exclude themselves from church membership.

Article X—BUSINESS MEETINGS

Section 1. The regular business meeting of the church shall be held annually near the close of the calendar year. Special business meetings may be called at any time by the church council or by the church itself, but they shall be announced publicly at least once to the congregation beforehand. It is the duty of every voting member to attend these meetings and remain until adjournment.

Section 2. At the annual meeting all regular officers shall be elected and other business of an annual meeting transacted. Every member is entitled to vote but shall not be elected to a church office until he or she has reached the age of twenty-one. No one below the age of twenty-five shall be elected as church deacon. A member shall not be elected to more than one church office. With the exception of the deacon a member shall not hold office for more than two successive terms. A Sunday School office and a church office shall not be considered as duplication.

Section 3. The secretary shall read all the resolutions or motions at the close of business meetings. All motions must be presented in written form.

Section 4. All accounts and reports of the congregation and its auxiliary societies shall be closed ten days prior to the annual business meeting and immediately thereupon reported to the church council, in order that the church council may incorporate these reports into its own report to the annual meeting.

Article XI—CHANGES AND AMENDMENTS

The church constitution may, if necessary, be changed or amended at a meeting called for this purpose. A two-thirds

majority of members voting is necessary for any changes or amendments. The intended amendment or change must be given in writing for discussion at an annual or special meeting. At this time it may be discussed, but the final vote shall not be taken until at least one week later.