

# First Mennonite Church - oldest of Christian - Moundridge Churches

by Emily Siemens

The First Mennonite Church of Christian, now located at 419 South Christian Avenue, Moundridge, has been a part of area history for nearly 100 years.

The name Christian has been with the church since its establishment. The original location of the church building was in the now-extinct village of Christian, Kansas, located in Garden and Alta Townships in Harvey County, extending into Mound and Turkey Creek Townships in McPherson County. Christian and Daniel Krehbiel, Christian Hirschler and Christian Voran bought the land and laid out the town site in 1874. The town was named after the three "Christian" founders.

The First Mennonite Church began with thirty settlers of South German stock that made their home in and around Christian and Halstead on land bought from the Santa Fe Railroad in 1874. Five days after their arrival, a church service was held in the schoolhouse in Halstead. Reverend Christian Krehbiel stated at the service, "We came to Kansas not merely to enjoy God's creation, but we desire even more to serve Him and build His Kingdom." Immediately a church was

organized, a constitution drawn, and deacons, elders, and ministers ordained.

Since the settlers were so spread out from Halstead to Christian, two churches were built, one in each town. They were known as the north and south churches. Cooperation between the two existed for a while but due to location they eventually both became independent.

Valentine Krehbiel was the first minister of the north church, in Christian. In the beginning the church had 65 members and 146 people attending. The Santa Fe donated money for educational purposes to both north and south churches for eight years.

Duties became overwhelming for Reverend Krehbiel so John Rupp and William Galle were ordained. A Sunday School for children or Christian Education program was started, beginning with a German reader for text and progressing to Bible history and then International Sunday School lessons.

By 1880, a sixteen foot addition was added to the Church of Christian to accommodate the swelling congregation but soon that was not adequate. In 1884 a new church building was dedicated. The church was

chartered under the name First Mennonite Church of Christian the same year. At that time there were 225 members and 415 persons attending.

The Eldorado-McPherson branch of the Missouri-Pacific Railroad established a station one mile north of Christian in 1886. The station, named Moundridge, became a new center of development. Many of the members of the First Mennonite Church of Christian lived in the new Moundridge area.

Reorganization of the First Church took place after the new building was in use. Conflicts over the constitution caused the "Garden Township" and "West Zion" churches to emerge.

In 1902 Valentine Krehbiel died. For five years the First Church had no elder. P. P. Wedel and John C. Goering were then ordained as ministers. Rev. Goering was elder from 1908 to 1917. Reverend Wedel became permanent elder and pastor.

Because of needed land and central location in a prospering town, the First Church was moved to Moundridge in 1908. It stood at the same place it is located today. A new school building was erected in 1909.

Prior to World War I services were held in German only, but

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due to pressures caused by the U.S. involvement in the war, the church was forced to modify this policy. On August 28, 1918, a typewritten notice was tacked to the church door reading: "Notice: no more German services will be allowed at this church." Services were, in actuality, still in German. However, twice a month a night service was held in English.

Many other changes took place. Vacation Bible School became a reality in 1926. Public schools were opened so there was no need for a church-run school any longer. A church library was started as a result. Eventually, services were given in English.

After World War II, in 1949, a new church was built to replace the 66-year-old one. The new building was built on the same grounds, where it stands today. For future expansion, the church was built with a 500-person capacity.

Reverend P. P. Wedel served the church for 46 years before resigning. He is still living at the Memorial Home for the Aged today. Rev. Wedel was replaced by Rev. Edmund J. Miller, who was with the church for eight years. Rev. Ralph K. Weber then became pastor till 1965, when Rev. Robert R. Coon took over.

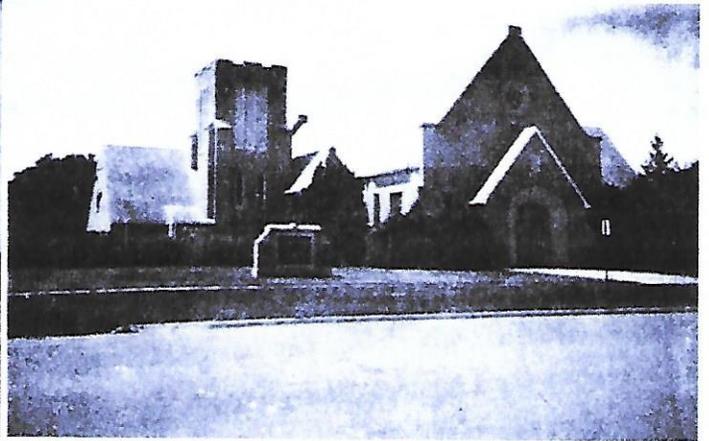
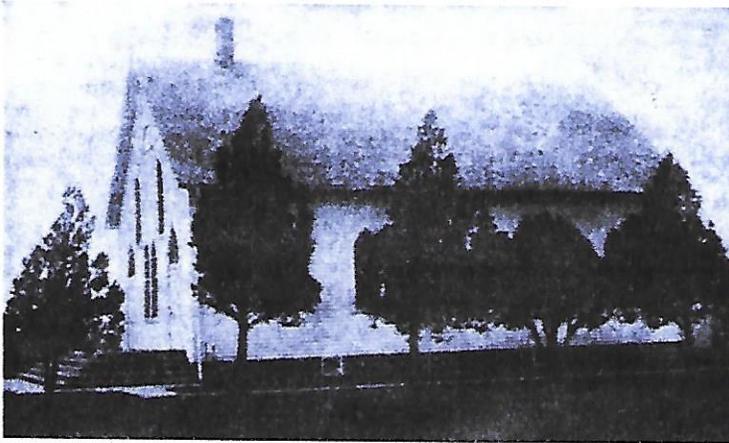
In 1965 First Church had a membership of 257 and an average attendance of 212 people. By 1971 the membership had increased to 273, however, average attendance decreased to 165.

In 1971 Rev. James Gingerich, from Burrton became pastor and holds the position today.

As of December 31, 1972, total membership of the First Church was 266, with an average attendance of 165.

Worship service is now held at 9:30 a.m. Sundays. Sunday School is at 10:30 a.m. Active organizations are youth fellowship, junior choir, chancel choir, sisters mission society, mission study workers, board of deacons, trustees, Christian education, and Christian Service and church council.

The First Mennonite Church of Christian tells a story of the past, and is a part of Moundridge area history being made today.



PAST AND PRESENT, The First Mennonite Church of Christian. The older structure was erected in 1884, Christian, Kansas. In 1908, it was moved to it's present site, Moundridge. The newer church, built in 1949, is used today.