OUR BICENTENNIAL

Two hundred years ago, in 1800, both our traditions took steps to organize Christian movements among German-speaking people, and we are their heirs in the faith. The language of the traditions now differs, and so does their organization, worship and church life. But our Lord Jesus Christ is the same -- yesterday, today and forever. So let's celebrate our longevity in His service this year with pride and joy.

To help us remember our humble but important origins, read the following selections from the combined account approved by our predecessors at the First General Conference of The Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1946. Some ways that the essence of these beginnings continues to influence us in The United Methodist Church are evident in Bishop Joseph Yeakel's article that follows.

THE EVANGELICAL UNITED BRETHREN CHURCH
HISTORICAL STATEMENT

Section I
Historical Background

....Both denominations are distinctly American Churches. They had their beginnings in the great spiritual awakening which visited the pioneering colonists in the new world after the middle of the eighteenth century. The following brief statements from the Discipline of The Church of the United Brethren in Christ and from the Discipline of The Evangelical Church indicate the historical and spiritual processes which led to the establishment of these two branches of the Christian Church.

Section II
The Origin of The Church of the United Brethren in Christ

In the eighteenth century it pleased the Lord our God to awaken persons in different parts of the world who should raise up the Christian religion from its fallen state and preach the gospel of Christ crucified in its purity.

Among others, He raised up William Otterbein and Martin Boehm, in the State of Pennsylvania, and George A. Guething, in the State of Maryland, armed them with spirit, grace, and strength to labor in His neglected vineyard, and to call, among the Germans in America, sinners to repentance. These men obeyed the call of their Lord and Master. Their labors were blessed, and they established in many places excellent societies and led many precious souls to Jesus Christ. Their sphere of action spread more and more, so that they found it necessary to look about for more fellow-laborers to toil in the vineyard of the Lord, for the harvest was great and the laborers were few. The Lord called others, who were willing to devote their strength to His service. Such persons were accepted by one or another of the preachers as fellow-laborers.

The number of members in the society in different parts of the country continued to increase as time passed, and the gracious work of reformation spread through the States of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. Several great meetings were appointed and held annually. On such occasions Otterbein would hold particular conversations with the preachers then present, and represent to them the importance of the ministry and the necessity of their utmost endeavors to save souls. At one of these meetings it was resolved to hold a conference of all the preachers, in order to consider what manner they might be most useful.

The first Conference was held in the city of Baltimore, Maryland, in the year of our Lord 1789...[Otterbein, Boehm, Guething, Christian Newcomer and three others attended.]

The second Conference was held in Paradise Township, York County, Pennsylvania, at the house of Brother John Spangler, in the year of our Lord 1791. [The same four, plus five others attended.]

....The number of members continued to increase, and the preachers were obliged to appoint
an Annual Conference, in order to unite themselves more closely and to labor more successfully in the vineyard of the Lord; for some had been Presbyterians or German Reformed, some Lutherans, and others Mennonites. They accordingly appointed a conference to be held on the 25th of September, 1800, in Frederick County, Maryland, at the house of Brother Frederick Kemp. [The same four, plus nine others were present.]

There they united themselves into a Society which bears the name United Brethren in Christ, and elected William Otterbein and Martin Boehm as Superintendents, or Bishops, and agreed that each of them should have liberty as to the mode of baptism, to administer it according to his own convictions.

From this time, the Society increasing still more and more, preachers were appointed to travel regularly, as the number of preaching-places could not otherwise be supplied. The work soon extended into the States of Ohio and Kentucky. It then became necessary to appoint a Conference in the State of Ohio, because it was thought too laborious for the preachers who labored in those States to travel annually such a great distance to Conference.

Meantime, Martin Boehm and George Guething died, and Bishop Otterbein desired that another Bishop should be elected (because infirmity and old age would not permit him to superintend any longer), who should take charge of the Society, and preserve discipline and order. It was resolved at a former Conference that whenever one of the Bishops died another should be elected in his place. Accordingly, Christian Newcomer was elected Bishop, to take charge of and superintend the concerns of the Society.

The want of a book of discipline in the Society had long been deeply felt. Partial attempts to provide one had been made at different times. Hence it was resolved, at the conference held in the State of Ohio, that a General Conference should be held, in order to provide the same, in a manner not derogatory to the Word of God. The members of this conference were to be elected from among the preachers in the different parts of the country by a vote of the Society in general. [Fourteen attended, but only Newcomer had been present at the earlier conferences.]

The Conference convened on the 6th of June, 1815, near Mt. Pleasant, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. After mature deliberation, they presented to their brethren a Book of Discipline, containing the doctrine and rules of the Church, desiring that these together with the Word of God, should be strictly observed...

Section III
The Origin of The Evangelical Association and The Evangelical Church

Upon the instruction and advice of that godly Minister of the Gospel, Jacob Albright, a number of persons in the State of Pennsylvania, who had become deeply convinced of their sinful state, through his ministrations, and who earnestly groaned to be delivered from sin, united A. D. 1800, and agreed to pray with and for each other, that they might be saved from sin, and flee from the wrath to come.

In order to accomplish this work properly, they agreed mutually to spend each Sunday in prayer and in the exercise of godliness; also to meet each Wednesday evening for prayer; diligently endeavoring to avoid everything evil and sinful, and to do all manner of good as God should give them strength and ability. The number of those disposed to attend these meetings soon increased, and grew daily.

The first steps toward organization were taken by Jacob Albright in 1800 when he organized three Classes, appointing a Class Leader for each Class. These Classes were: Liesser's Class near Colebrookdale Iron Works, in Berks County, Pennsylvania; Walter's Class near Quakertown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania; and Philip's Class, Northampton County, Pennsylvania.

On November 3, 1803, there was held the first council of the denomination. [Jacob Albright, John Walter, Abraham Liesser, Jacob Phillips, George...]}
Miller and twelve others were present.

The first Conference was held, in 1807, in the home of Samuel Becker, at Muhlbach, then Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, now Kleinfeltersville, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania. This Conference included all the officers of the Church, five Itinerant Ministers, three Local Preachers, twenty Class Leaders and Exhorters. The membership of the Church was 220.

As Jacob Albright by the grace of God was the instrument of their solemn union and holy zeal in the exercise of godliness, they were at first frequently called "The Albrights." But in the year 1816, they formally adopted the name, The Evangelical Association, which is, therefore, an ecclesiastical union of such persons as desire to have not merely the form of godliness, but strive to possess the substance and power thereof... 


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ON SWALLOWING GNATS: BICENTENNIAL RUMINATIONS

by Joseph H. Yeakel

The General Conference meeting in Cleveland, Ohio will be celebrating the 216th anniversary of the beginnings of the church known presently as the United Methodist Church (UMC), its founding date being the Christmas Conference of 1784 of The Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Also being celebrated is the 200th anniversary of the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) Church, a union of The United Brethren in Christ (1800) and The Evangelical Association (1803).

The year 2000 is also the 32nd anniversary of the denominational name "United Methodist" (1968-2000), which supersedes the denominational names "Methodist" (1939-1968, 29 years) and "Evangelical United Brethren" (1946-1968, 22 years).

We were painfully aware that as EUBs, we could never brag about being the largest of anything. We could only say that we were loved, called and sent by God. We were conscious that our heritage was a remarkable mixture of poverty and wealth. We were committed to an educated ministry. Our theology and polity were intentionally inclusive. Integration, women in ordained ministry and justice ministry flowed from a simple and profound faith in God's final victory. And because this was true, we found ourselves free to throw our resources and ourselves into every effort that appeared to advance God's reign. Our focus was on relationship and community. Attendance was more important than numbers, and community more important than membership. We constantly searched for representative structures at every level of the denomination. The possibility of union with the Methodist Church was cause for much excitement.
Article V of The Constitution as adopted by the uniting conference in 1968 remains unchanged to this day and reads, "Ecumenical Relations -- As part of the church universal, The United Methodist Church believes that the Lord of the church is calling Christians everywhere to strive toward unity, and therefore it will seek, and work for, unity at all levels of church life." (The Book of Discipline, 1996, p. 22)

Such a Constitutional statement is totally missing from the last edition of The Discipline of the EUB Church. However, it accurately represents the activities and mindset of the EUB people as they sought union with the Methodist people, and as portrayed in their local and regional participation in various Councils of Churches and other expressions of ecumenical witness and service.

It is important, however, for us to remember and recognize that denominational union/mergers are more easily voted and legislated than they are made real and achieved in the lives of the constituents.

Actually, the union of '68 was not difficult to achieve once the required votes had been recorded. There were many reasons that this was the case. Among them was the ecumenical spirit that was alive and well at the time. The words of Jesus in his high priestly prayer, "that they may all be one...so that the world may believe" (John 17:21-22), were to be acted upon, literally. And further, we were partners in all the major ecumenical efforts: The National Council of Churches (NCC), The World Council of Churches (WCC) and The Consultation on Church Union (COCU). All of which placed our leadership in common settings that revived memories of earlier conversations of the possibility of merger.

Looking back, a number of our people suggested that the EUBs were a denomination still seeking a more definitive ecclesiology, which they claimed was late in developing. Perhaps Bishop Seybert's standard, "without a bell, a tower...and a debt," had influence into times that no longer understood nor supported it. Identity, discipline and accountability were worthy goals. Others would contend that we had difficulty defining ourselves as a distinct denomination. When people asked, we tended to say that we were much like the Methodists.

More motivating was the fact that these two denominations, separated in their beginnings by language and national backgrounds, could no longer validate the need for separation. Our covenant understandings as expressed in our Books of Discipline presented no major insurmountable difficulties; our general agencies were parallel, except that size and financial resources limited the extent to which ours could be developed, and the primary faith statements, The Articles of Religion for the Methodists and The Confession of Faith for the EUBs, were deemed compatible in spite of the technicalities of theological language. The inevitable question became, "Why not?"

Size also had much to do with the merger. Bishop Wayne Clymer, then president of Evangelical Theological Seminary, spoke to this issue by asking the question in his poem, "What can God do with so few?" (EUBs numbered about 750,000 at the time; Methodists 9 million.)

But size has both limitations and advantages. Among our limitations were our inabilitys to provide leadership in some critical areas of the church's mission. While we had agency structures in Missions, Education, Evangelism, the Women's Division, Pensions and Publications, we assigned many functions to individual staff in addition to their primary responsibility, or assigned the portfolio to an agency with the hopes that it could find a way to implement the assignment. In addition to the above, the Council of Administration staff handled the finance, administration, stewardship and social concerns responsibilities.

The Methodists were more fully staffed and had a complement of additional agencies. We were happy to join with these ongoing ministries. The merging of the staffs of the two denominations went smoothly, for the most part, and proved to be a helpful contribution to the new denomination.

One of the major differences and one of the advantages will be in evidence at the General Conference as the Connectional Process Team (CPT) report highlights the need to be sure that all of the church is represented at the table where "conferencing" takes place. In the EUB church, both the General Council on Administration, which had limited powers to adjust the work of the denomination between General Conferences, and the General Program Council, which brought all of the general agencies together, including the Board
of Bishops, provided the forum for conferencing wherein the components of program, personnel and finance met in Council to counsel together. Methodism's historic separation of these three is yet to be satisfactorily resolved. Size was no doubt a contributing factor, enabling the EUBs to function together. This basic commitment of the EUB Program Council was adopted in name but not in structure in the new church. Structuring for connection and cooperation rather than competition in the UMC is yet to be achieved.

Again, size affected the work and structure of our Board of Missions, especially as it related to our churches outside the U.S. Prior to the union of '68, Dr. John F. Schaefer, Executive Secretary of the Board, addressing a meeting of Commission on the Structure of Methodism Overseas, spoke of the EUB experience:

One of the factors which contributed to the [mission] policy was the size of the [former] denominations. Prior to the union of The Evangelical Church and The United Brethren in Christ, the membership of these two denominations was approximately equal and less than one-half of the present membership. The size of the two churches placed rigid limitations upon their missionary program both in personnel and financial support. The conferences organized overseas were small and faced a struggle to survive. It became evident to the mission leaders at home and to the national Christians and the missionaries that it would be most advantageous to join with other churches in a united Protestant effort. Both former churches found it extremely difficult to work independently and sought the opportunity of cooperating with other denominational mission boards and with other Protestant churches overseas. This, however, was but one factor and the least important... Far more important was the shift in opinion within the general church which had crystallized sufficiently by 1925 to enable the General Conference of the United Brethren in Christ to adopt the following resolution: "Upon the request of a foreign mission conference, the board is hereby granted authority to take such steps in cooperation and federation of work abroad with other missions after consideration as may be necessary and desirable for the development of a victorious native church." This was a carte blanche for the mission board to promote and encourage united effort overseas.

The 1963 Discipline states the authority as follows: "§1627. The board [of missions] is empowered to take such steps toward the federation and unification of work abroad with other missions or church bodies as may effectively promote the development of an indigenous church." This authority was not changed from 1925 except to make its language politically correct. The point being that the Board of Missions had the power to act, while presently this power remains with the General Conference.

The issue of what it means to be a Global Church is facing this session of the General Conference through the work of the CPT report. It is suggested that the time has come to structure the United Methodist Church as a Global Church. Basic structures would include Central Conferences in at least four major regions of the world. The annual conferences of the U.S. are proposed to become one of these regions as a Central Conference. Thus, as we enter the 21st century, the questions of mission and ministry are before us on a global scale. Whatever the answers, the challenge to follow Christ into this new day is one that the United Methodist people are prepared to embrace.

**Cleveland and the Evangelicals**

- The Evangelical Association/Evangelical Church was headquartered in Cleveland, OH for 90 years (1854-1944).
- In 1854 the Publishing House of the Evangelical Association was moved from New Berlin, PA to a newly constructed three-story building at Woodland Ave. and Harmon St. in Cleveland.
- In 1928 the Publishing House and headquarters of the denomination moved to the former Wooltex Building on Superior Ave, between East 19th and East 21st Streets.
- In 1944 the building was sold to Tower Publishing, with the printing operation moved to Harrisburg, PA and the denominational agencies to Dayton, OH in anticipation of EUB Union.
Ohio has been a central place in the United Brethren and Evangelical traditions from their early years to the present. When the Evangelical United Brethren Church was created in 1946 its national headquarters was located in Dayton, Ohio, but both Evangelical and United Brethren headquarters had been in the State since the mid-nineteenth century. Both had been established in close relation to their publishing houses, which were located in Cleveland for Evangelicals and in Dayton for United Brethren. The latter also established its first college, appropriately called Otterbein, in Westerville in 1847, which still thrives. Dayton was also the place United Brethren located their theological school, Union Biblical Seminary, in 1871; now called United Theological Seminary it continues as one of the thirteen United Methodist seminaries. Today the former EUB headquarters building houses the United Methodist General Council on Ministries and other denominational offices. Moreover, the beginnings of women's missionary societies in both denominations were in Ohio, and the first woman ordained by the United Brethren in 1889 was reared in the State and graduated from the Dayton seminary.

The ministry of both Evangelicals and United Brethren in Ohio began more humbly among German settlers who originally were followers of Philip William Otterbein, Martin Boehm and Jacob Albright in Pennsylvania and Maryland and then migrated to the new State. Differences in the ways the two German-speaking fellowships took shape reveal distinctive approaches that make clear why their similar mission made early union impossible.

By 1806 identifiable members of each group had settled in Ohio. Two brothers who had joined the Albright movement in western Pennsylvania, Daniel and Philip Hoy, started farms northwest of Lancaster, but no regular Evangelical ministry was organized for a decade. In the same vicinity George Benedum and Abraham Hiestand, who had been United Brethren preachers in the east, continued to preach informally. The first United Brethren class in Ohio was organized in 1806 by Andrew Zeller in his house at Germantown, southwest of Dayton.

When United Brethren leader Christian Newcomer first traveled to Ohio in 1810 he discovered several preachers who had served in the original Eastern Conference. Perceiving that the time was ripe to organize the informal efforts of isolated local preachers, Newcomer convened "a little conference with the brethren" at Michael Kreider's farmhouse north of Circleville. Fifteen preachers attended, and Newcomer organized them as the Miami Conference. With no authorization from anyone, he created the second annual conference, but the United Brethren were still evolving their organization and such pragmatic action fit the need of the time and was approved later. Unlike Methodist itinerants, United Brethren preachers in Ohio were primarily farmers who preached when chores and crops permitted. In 1812, for example, the Minutes of the Miami Conference recorded that only three of twelve preachers "gave themselves up freely to travel the circuit"; in 1817 only five of sixteen did so. For United Brethren both local and traveling preachers were equally members of annual conference, a practice that offended Francis Asbury's sense of discipline and was equally disliked by the Albright people.
complete. Growth of the Evangelicals was slow, with 229 members reported in 1819 and only 368 by 1826. Heeding the plea of Ohioans, the Association in the latter year created a Western Conference, but it was closely supervised by the older Eastern Conference rather than being autonomous. Its primary value was to save itinerants a trip of hundreds of miles to annual conference yearly. Difficulties raising money and recruiting preachers for the rugged work in Ohio led the Association to appoint the experienced Presiding Elder Henry Niebel to direct its new Western Conference. Under his leadership the denomination's efforts in Ohio improved by the 1830s.

Among the United Brethren the work in Ohio was more favorable. In contrast to the subservient status imposed on the Western Conference by the Evangelical Association, the Miami Conference played a formative role in shaping the United Brethren in Christ. It was the Miami Conference that appealed in 1813 to William Otterbein "to ordain, by the laying on of hands, one or more preachers, who afterwards may perform the same for others" so as to reduce the lack of order in receiving and ordaining preachers in the new denomination. In response, Otterbein ordained Christian Newcomer and two others as elders just six weeks before he died in November 1813. The fact that Newcomer already had been elected bishop for a year by the Eastern Conference, five months prior to the ordination, evidenced the disordered state of United Brethren polity at the time. Also it was the Miami Conference that called for the first representative General Conference in 1815, at which the denomination settled its polity and adopted its first official Discipline. When a second General Conference met in 1817 it elected Andrew Zeller from the Miami Conference as a bishop to assist Newcomer.

These creative moves, together with the decision to enlarge its English language ministry, enabled the United Brethren to grow more rapidly in Ohio than the Evangelicals. By 1839 the latter reported 7,859 total members of the Association, whereas the United Brethren had an estimated membership of over 20,000. The fact that the latter estimated their numbers while Evangelicals and Methodists accurately counted theirs was another evidence of the lack of orderly discipline that kept the movements apart in early years. In 1834 the United Brethren created a publishing house at Circleville, which began to publish the denominational weekly, The Religious Telescope. Both the publishing house and paper moved to Dayton in 1853.

By 1839 the era of beginnings for both denominations had ended. That year the Evangelicals elected John Seybert as their first bishop since Jacob Albright's death in 1808, and much of Seybert's work centered in Ohio, where he lies buried in Seybert Cemetery near Bellevue (now part of the Bishop John Seybert/Flat Rock Cluster United Methodist Heritage Landmark). A year earlier the Association had erected its first church building in Ohio at Greensburg, near Akron, ending the long-time custom of meeting in houses and cabins. Two months after Seybert's election, the United Brethren Miami Conference met in a brick church at Germantown, a mile from Andrew Zeller's house where the movement had first organized in Ohio and where the conference previously had met four times. As both denominations moved from homes to churches and adopted more permanent forms of government, a new era began, which led to Ohio's central place for EUBs both historically and geographically.

**ABOUT THIS ISSUE:**

This issue is being distributed not only to our usual mailing list but also to the delegates of the United Methodist General Conference at Cleveland in May. It will be distributed when the Center for the EUB Heritage presents an audio-visual program recognizing the 200th anniversary of the origins of our traditions, led by Bishop George W. Bashore (UTS '58).

Joseph H. Yeakel (UTS '52) pastored several EUB churches, was a staff member of the Board of Evangelism and became its Executive Secretary in 1965. In 1968 he was elected General Secretary of the United Methodist Board of Evangelism and in 1972 was elected Bishop, presiding over the New York and Washington-Baltimore Areas. Since retirement he resides in Smithsburg, MD.

Donald K. Gorrell edits the Telescope-Messenger and is a retired Professor of Church History, UTS.
ANECDOTAGE

Justina Lorenz Showers, born in 1885, a longtime leader in the UB Women's Missionary Association and EUB Women's Society of World Service, and widow of Bishop J. Balmer Showers, was asked by an oral history interviewer: "Would you comment on what you mean by the democracy of the church?" At age 95, she remembered the following about her United Brethren heritage:

...Our church was born in times of poverty, when people came from another nation, with almost no goods. They had to make their way; life was very simple. And everyone was...struggling to make a living. So there were no classes--no caste system of any kind....I think that spirit in which our church was born was still in existence when I began to know something about the church. Our constitution had been built on such ideas and such thoughts....There was no idea of sex at that time; the only idea of race was that we didn't believe in slavery and we...couldn't go into the states where slavery existed. But our method of working was democratic. Our General Conference delegates were elected by ballot in the congregations; each one had a chance to vote for someone. The time came when, for some reason or another, that privilege was taken away, and the Conference elected the delegates. But in the beginning, every member in the church had a right to vote for somebody for delegate to the General Conference. Women had an equal place. Women were delegates to the General Conference. Women were allowed to preach--even sometimes when they were married and were a deterrent to their husband preacher, doing better than he did; nevertheless they were allowed to preach. And when it came to the impulse for women to be interested in missions...the men of our church encouraged us. Dr. Funkhauser presided over the first group of women meeting to see whether they could organize a Women's organization. And all along the way, the men encouraged the women in that work. So that in every way, everyone was equal--it was a real democracy. I think I noticed it especially as I think in terms of the bishopric....When I was in college, I was a 'run of the mill' member of my class. When, at the 50th reunion, the powers that be learned that my husband was a bishop, I became a somebody! Just recently a seminary student was asked to take a bishop to the airport, and he was reported to have said that he was scared, and didn't know what he could talk about--how should he act? That wasn't the case in the UB Church. Our bishops were just somebody among many who were needed in supervisors of the work. And they were very human....

I think we honored them, yes. But I think our attitude was expressed by my husband when he said, "In the UB Church, we think bishops are as good as anybody if they behave themselves!" I think I've said all I can on that subject.

Justina Lorenz Showers, Oral Interview, Nov. 5, 1980, UTS Library