Thriving Former EUB Churches: North of the Border

by

Brian Hotrum

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In North America there are 15 churches named after the founder of the Evangelical Church, Jacob Albright. Fourteen are United Methodist churches in the United States and one is in Canada. Albright Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, is a thriving church today. It has an average Sunday morning worship attendance of 400. It has a variety of age level ministries and provides a healthy support for missions. In 2006 Albright Church started a daughter church just north of Winnipeg. Thus today Albright Church is a healthy, vibrant, medium-sized church. It was the first church of the Evangelical Association in western Canada.

From the 1870s Evangelicals from the Dakotas had been moving northward into Canada. Sending a missionary to this area was discussed for over 20 years. “The Dakota, Minnesota and Ontario conferences all studied and discussed sending a missionary to this area, but nothing occurred until 1899, when a young probationer, W. E. Beese volunteered to go to western Canada, beginning ministry in Winnipeg, Manitoba.”

On November 22, 1900, Beese’s work resulted in the establishment of a church with 14 members. This was a small beginning, but the work was established and led to more missionaries coming to western Canada from the Dakotas.

While the Evangelicals were expanding this new work, planting a new church almost every year, other denominations were moving towards union in Canada. The result was the formation of the United Church of Canada in 1925. This was a merger in Canada of the Methodist Church, the Congregational Church, most of the Presbyterian churches, and the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. But the Evangelical Church did not join this union.

By 1926 there were 21 Evangelical fields open in western Canada. “Five fields were exclusively English, nine were German, and seven used both languages.” The following year the Northwest Canada Conference was organized by the Evangelical Church.

The 1946 merger forming the Evangelical United Brethren Church had little effect on the churches in western Canada since all of the United Brethren churches had joined the United Church of Canada two decades earlier. The Evangelical churches in eastern Canada were theologically more “liberal” than were their brothers and sisters in western Canada. The eastern Canadian EUBs had petitioned to join the United Church of Canada as early as 1950 and eventually did so in 1968 (the Canadian Methodists were already members of the United Church of Canada and were not part of the 1968 merger to create the United Methodist Church). Consequently the Evangelical churches in western Canada became more independent and self-sufficient.

At the organizing session of the Northwest Canada Conference in 1927, the idea of establishing a Bible college was proposed and came to fruition in 1941 when a school was established in Regina, Saskatchewan. Six years
later the school and the conference superintendent's office were relocated to Medicine Hat, Alberta, where there was a strong Evangelical presence. For a time Medicine Hat, a city of about 60,000, became the center of the Northwest Canada EUB Conference.

With the move to Medicine Hat the name of the college, Regina Bible Institute, was renamed Hillcrest Christian College. Sunday services were held in the chapel of the college primarily for the students. People from the community, however, began attending these services and two years later, in 1949, Hillcrest EUB Church was organized. As the congregation grew it developed its own building and in 1957 moved into it. By 1968 Hillcrest EUB Church was the largest in the conference. The Church continued thriving, completing another building program in 1988 and planting a daughter congregation in Medicine Hat in 2002. Today Hillcrest Church has an average Sunday attendance of approximately 1,000 and is the largest in Medicine Hat. It has a variety of programs and has a strong mission emphasis.

At the time of the merger to form the United Methodist Church, the Northwest Canada Conference found itself in a unique position. Methodist churches no longer existed in Canada as a separate denomination but were part of the United Church of Canada. The EUB churches remaining, primarily in western Canada, felt no affinity to the United Church and petitioned for autonomy from the United Methodist Church. It took some time for legal matters to be settled, but in 1970 full autonomy was granted.

In 1992 the Annual Conference was held at Hillcrest Church. Positive changes were underway at this conference. At the time of the 1968 merger the Western Canada Conference had expressed interest in merging with an evangelical denomination in Canada rather than entering the United Methodist Church or the United Church of Canada. Plans were formalized at the 1992 conference to merge with the Missionary Church to form the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada.

Because of this merger, Hillcrest College merged with Mountain View Bible College (a college of the Missionary Church) and both schools relocated to Calgary, Alberta. Renamed Rocky Mountain College, it is today a significant liberal arts college in western Canada. At the same time the conference office also relocated to Calgary which became the center of Evangelical work in western Canada.

The largest church in Calgary, a city of one million people, is Centre Street. Centre Street Church was begun in 1958 by 62 charter members sent from Salem EUB Church in Calgary. “In less than one year this new congregation purchased a parsonage and lots for a new church, and built the church. On May 24, 1959 the new Centre Street Church was dedicated by EUB Bishop E.W. Praetorius.”

Today, on an average weekend, Centre Street Church ministers to 6,000 people during its four weekend services at the main campus or at one of the three satellite campuses around the city. It is a large church and one can easily get lost in the crowd in a sanctuary that seats 2,500. To help newcomers connect with others in such a large church, members and staff have developed over 170 small groups that are the core of this church’s ministry.

The Evangelical churches in western Canada, particularly in places like Calgary, Medicine Hat, and Winnipeg have seen many changes since 1900. Yet the “Son’s of Albright” continue to proclaim the same life-changing gospel preached by Jacob Albright.

Two Families: One Bond  
by  
Barbara Cramer Crouse

The Cramers

My story begins in 1946 when my parents and I moved to the college town of Millersville, Pennsylvania. Shortly after our arrival we joined Grace Evangelical United Brethren Church (formerly an Evangelical Church), partially because the church was only five doors up the street. My mother was a devout Evangelical Lutheran who was raised by her grandparents after her mother died. My father, on the other hand, did not become a Christian until he was baptized by an Army Chaplain while on duty in France during World War II.

Despite their different religious backgrounds, Mom and Daddy soon found themselves happily immersed in the life of Grace Church. They taught Sunday school classes and became known for their ability to relate to any age group. Both of my parents loved music and I inherited that love. One of my fondest recollections was the wonderful sounds the church organist made while playing hymns from the green Evangelical hymnals that were soon replaced with new EUB hymnals.

Since we lived so close to the church we often hosted guest missionary speakers. I loved to hear their stories as we sat around the dinner table. The missionaries usually presented slide shows on Sunday evening and there was always a good turnout for them. The opportunity to hear missionary speakers and to learn about our denomination’s work in many parts of the world had a major influence on me. Such opportunities are not as readily available to United Methodist young people today.

During the time we were at Grace EUB we had only two pastors: Rev. Glenn Matter and his wife Margaret and Rev. Kenneth Texter and his wife June. Both pastors were our good friends and guided my family through some difficult personal times. When I was 15, I responded to an altar call during the playing of the hymn “Are ye Able?” By the time I graduated from high school I was certain my decision to dedicate my musical talent to God was “right.” So in 1960 I began a two-hour commute to the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music.

My parents were also wrestling with their “call.” After recovery from a malignant melanoma that took part of Mom’s foot, my parents traveled to Kentucky for a much-needed vacation. During the trip they spent three days visiting Red Bird Mission. On the return trip to Pennsylvania both of my parents agreed that “there must be something we could do other than send monetary gifts.” This idea was pushed along by a few words from Fred and Grace Brandauer, missionaries on furlough from their service in Indonesia, during a Sunday dinner with us.

In December 1963 Martha and Chet returned to Red Bird Mission to interview for what they thought was a six-month tour of service. During the Sunday service at the Beverly Church, Dr. Robert E. Airhart’s sermon used Luke 9:62 “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” as his text. This message spoke to my parents and after much prayer and agonizing, they eventually returned to Red Bird Mission, but instead of six months they remained for 18 years! Before their return they were commissioned as Home Missionaries by Dr. Bernard L. Cook in Grace EUB Church, Millersville.

Initially, Chet and Martha were Boys Dormitory parents and Chet was director of the boys work program. After five years he and Martha were given the new job as Directors of Resource Development. They met with residents throughout that part of Kentucky to show them how to make their crafts more marketable. They also traveled throughout many states showing those wares. By the time they retired in 1982 Red Bird Crafts had a nationwide reputation for high quality. Eventually the building that now houses the craft shop on the Queendale campus was named “The Cramer Building.”

My parents had found their calling, but what about mine? My dream had been sidetracked
when early in 1963 I contracted infectious mononucleosis and had to drop out of the Philadelphia Conservatory in the middle of my junior year. Since my parents sold our house in Millersville before going to Red Bird, and since I was out of school, I moved there with them. I was attracted to the area and its people immediately. I met a young teacher next door whose name was Randy Crouse, and with my introduction to him began the bond between the “two families.” But I am getting ahead of myself.

I was determined to finish my college education and with EUB scholarship help (for children of missionaries) I was admitted to Shenandoah College and Conservatory of Music in Winchester, Virginia, to begin my own dorm and campus adventures in September 1964. I wanted to be a concert organist; dating or marriage did not interest me. My eye was on the prize—I would be world-famous. But God had other plans for me.

After an analysis of my credits from the Philadelphia Conservatory, I was disappointed to learn that many of them would not be accepted. It looked like I would have to study three full years at Shenandoah to earn a degree. Fortunately, with the intervention of President Forrest S. Racey and the help of several faculty members it was finally concluded that I could earn the degree Bachelor of Music in Church Music, with a major in organ performance and a minor in piano by the spring of 1967.

In 1965 came the news that changed my life. An elementary and secondary school music teacher was desperately needed at Red Bird School for the 1966-67 school year. If one could not be found, the school would not meet state certification requirements. The Mission Superintendent’s wife, Mrs. John W. (Donna) Bischoff, approached me about accepting the job. But I was trained as a performer, not a classroom teacher. As I made excuses for why it wouldn’t work, her parting comment was “Well, can’t a need be a call?” After returning to Shenandoah the “need” of Red Bird School haunted me. To add to my thoughts was the fact that I was starting to feel a more-than-friends attraction toward Randy Crouse. But I gradually came to the conclusion that I could “make a difference” at Red Bird. Now, I had a new resolve.

By taking many more credit hours than normally allowed, I was able to earn my degree from Shenandoah in 1966—a year early. Not all of my professors were entirely supportive. My organ teacher asked me why I wanted to waste my time and talent “teaching at some mission school.” Unfortunately at that stage in my life I could not verbalize clearly to him that God had placed a different call on me. Correspondence with the Commonwealth of Kentucky revealed that I needed only two courses to gain certification in Kentucky. I took those in the summer of 1966 at Union College which was only an hour away from Beverly. In the middle of all of this frenzied activity, on July 17, 1966, I was commissioned as a Home Missionary in Grace Church by Dr. Norman Klump.

By the opening of school on August 22nd, I answered the call. I did the best I could to fill the vacant music position for one year and then a music education person was hired to take my place. I assisted her in the classroom, played the organ for local church worship services, gave private lessons, and occasionally took my autoharp and dulcimer to a few of the schools at some of the outreach centers. By this time my relationship with Randy Crouse had gone from friend to spouse. We had known each other since April 1964, and when I was away at school we carried on a regular correspondence. When I returned as a teacher, events moved rapidly and we were married in August 1967 in the Stull Memorial EUB Church on the Beverly campus.

The Crouses

R andall (Randy) came from Harlan, a small town in north-central Kansas, the location of the former Gould College featured in last month’s Telescope-Messenger. He went off to Sterling College (a Presbyterian school in Sterling, Kansas) with no clear idea what to do with “the rest of his life.” He drifted into a major because he had most of his hours in business, typing, economics, and psychology. “Since I still had a big gap in my schedule, my sister Shirley suggested I take a teaching block.” Partially because of an excellent instructor, Randy saw
teaching as a promising future for him. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in May 1960.

The Crouses grew up in a strong mission-oriented church and had heard about Red Bird Mission many times. Randy and his sister applied simultaneously at Red Bird School. There was an immediate need for a high school business and typing teacher, but there was no position for Shirley, so Randy loaded his little red 1960 Plymouth Valiant and headed for the mountains. Only once did he have misgivings and that was as he continued winding farther and farther back into the isolated area just a few miles from the Beverly campus. Once he arrived he was fine and spent the next 11 years of his life there. For the first few years he was a teacher by day and a Boys Dorm parent by night. He was also at various times assistant librarian, as well as assistant principal.

When the Cramers arrived, Randy had been at Red Bird for four years and Shirley had arrived in the fall of 1961 when she filled an opening for a 3rd and 4th grade teacher. In 1962 Shirley helped start the first summer kindergarten. She earned a master’s degree from the University of Tennesse in 1972 and started the Early Childhood Development program at Red Bird that year. She taught in that program until her retirement in 2003. About her career, Shirley says: “God has given me opportunities to teach adults to read and to tutor children. I have been active in United Methodist Women in a number of conference committees, and have served as a director on the General Board of Discipleship. Chet and Martha Cramer served as second parents for me.”

Shirley Crouse recently was honored for 50 years of Home Missionary service at the 90th anniversary year Homecoming celebration at Red Bird Mission School. This honor was richly deserved because Shirley is a fine example of the commitment that has held Red Bird Mission together for many years. A woman of prayer, she regularly storms the gates of Heaven on behalf of the work there. Red Bird School has had some difficult years recently, and each additional year the school is able to remain open is a financial miracle.

Randy and I served as a couple at Red Bird until 1971 when we felt a call to Otterbein Home, a United Methodist Agency in Lebanon, Ohio. Since that time we have raised our family and become deeply entrenched in both the Otterbein community and nearby Hope United Methodist Church (formerly Hunter Community EUB). Randy was employed at Otterbein Home for 32 years. At various times he was cashier, business manager, office manager, and Resident Insurance Counselor. Although he “retired” in 2003, he has continued in his insurance counselor role as a volunteer. Through the years I have been Music Director at Hope and I still play, sing, teach, and conduct my way through many joyful musical experiences.

But there is a third Crouse. In 1979 Phyllis, younger sister to Shirley and Randy, came to Red Bird School. Phyllis had been teaching in Kansas for 10 years. After their mother’s tragic death in an automobile accident, Phyllis decided to join her sister at Red Bird (Randy and I were in Ohio by this time). This was a difficult period for the Crouse siblings. During this time Chet and Martha Cramer definitely filled in as parents for them and this role continued in the years that followed.

When Phyllis first arrived in Kentucky she had the opportunity to teach some reading classes in 1979 and 1980. Then she taught 5th grade for two years in the old Beverly school before it was destroyed by fire in May 1981. Temporary quarters were set up until a new school could be built “down the river” near what is now the Queendale campus where Phyllis taught 3rd and 4th grades in those temporary facilities for two years. Once the new school was complete, she taught 1st grade there from 1982 to 1986. By then she had received her librarian certification from the University of Kentucky and became the elementary school librarian. She plans to continue in that post until retirement.
So that is the story of two families, three Cramers and three Crouses, who have served within the present Red Bird Missionary Conference. What is the bond that holds these six people together? Obviously, friendships and a marriage were a result of the bond. But beyond that is the cement that holds all Christians together. That bond is Jesus Christ and his mandate to serve the least among us and to make disciples throughout the world, including the mountains of Kentucky.

Grace Evangelical United Brethren Church
by
Chester Cramer

The following history of Grace Church, Millersville, was written by the father of Barbara Crouse, the author of the previous article. Although this article was written in 1962, toward the end of the EUB era, Grace is still a strong church today and is in the midst of its 200th anniversary celebration. Some editorial changes and additions have been made to the original article.

Grace Evangelical United Brethren Church had its beginning in 1802 or 1803 when Jacob Albright organized a class in the Millersville area. Among the first to greet Jacob Albright was a widow, Elizabeth Thomas, who resided near the junction of the Conestoga and the Little Conestoga creeks. She had four sons—Jacob and John Ripley by her first husband and David and Christian Thomas by her second husband. All four sons eventually became ministers and men of prominence in the early church in Millersville, as did John Ripley’s son-in-law, Michael Kneisley.

During the early years of activity in the area, Jacob Albright and his followers met in homes, barns, and often in the meadows along Conestoga Creek. In 1812 Millersville become a regular appointment on the Lancaster circuit (thus making 2012 the 200th year) and it may be assumed that worship services were conducted on a regular basis by circuit riding pastors.

It was during this attachment to the Lancaster circuit that a brick meeting house was erected along the turnpike leading to Safe Harbor (West Frederick Street) in the year 1852. The original building was enlarged in 1866 and at that time a steeple and bell were added.

Grace Church continued as a part of the Lancaster circuit until 1877. By this time the circuit had grown to the point where it was necessary to divide it into two. The result was the creation of the Millersville circuit that consisted of Mount Joy, Reich’s Class, Milton Grove, and Millersville. In 1884 the conference designated Millersville, New Danville, and vicinity as Millersville Mission with Rev. A.B. Saylor as the first missionary pastor.


During the later half of the 19th century Grace church grew steadily and on September 1, 1895, during the pastorate of Rev. G. Wes Marquardt, the cornerstone was laid for a new, larger edifice to replace the original structure. Rev. A.J. Brunner preached the sermon at the cornerstone laying service. Construction proceeded rapidly, and on the last Sunday in 1895 the new structure was dedicated with Bishop Rudolph Dubs presiding.

As an example of what can be done when Christians have a will to work together, the congregation started to raise money in late summer; when the building was dedicated at the end of the year, it was debt free. The total cost for the new structure was $7,500—a substantial sum in 1895.

[Editor's note. The date for the construction of the new church and the rapidity of its construction was caused by the split within the Evangelical Association that began in 1891 and reached its culmination in 1894 when the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania ruled that church properties belonged to the majority, i.e., the Evangelical Association. The minority, the United Evangelicals lost rights to their church property. Millersville Grace was a United Evangelical Church and thus lost rights to the 1852 structure.

Since most of the Evangelical Association members in Pennsylvania went with the United Evangelicals, the result was that most church properties were in the hands of a small minority. In some cases the United Evangelicals were able to purchase their former church building, but in others such as Millersville, quick plans were made for the
construction of a new building—in the case of Millersville Grace successfully so.]

In 1905 a parsonage was added replacing a previous one that had stood on the same site. This, too, was free of debt by the end of Rev. G.A. Maurey’s stay as pastor of Grace Church in 1908. The next few years saw many changes around the church and parsonage. Electric lights were installed in the church, Sunday school facilities were improved by remodeling the interior so that the main Sunday school room could be separated from the sanctuary by sliding doors, the parsonage was redecorated as was the sanctuary, and 4¼ acres of ground were purchased to enlarge the cemetery.

During the pastorate of Rev. W.E. Messersmith (1926-1933) additional renovations were completed in the church and parsonage. Mr. Frank Heistand donated a Midmer-Losh pipe organ which with modifications serves Grace Church to this date [1962].

In 1933 Rev. S.P. Erisman returned to Grace Church more than 40 years after having received a call to ministry from Grace Church. He served as pastor for two years and then retired from service, having made a complete circle from call to retirement. The next pastor was Rev. E.P. Wadsworth during whose term a new Sunday school unit was constructed at a cost of $4,000.

Rev. Glenn Matter was appointed to serve Grace Church in 1945. He served in that capacity until 1957, thus completing the longest pastorate to date in the history of the congregation. At the end of World War II during Rev. Matter’s ministry the young men returning to the church from the far flung corners of the world where the fortunes of war had taken them found the Sunday school facilities to be seriously overcrowded. The excavation of the area beneath the sanctuary seemed to be the solution to the space problem but the cost was prohibitive and so the men and boys of Grace Church and Sunday school pooled their abilities and strength to excavate a large area in which a Sunday School room was then built by a contractor. This room was dedicated as a memorial to those who served in the Armed Forces. It now serves as a Sunday school room for the men’s classes.

In 1957 Rev. Kenneth R. Texter was assigned as pastor. To meet the needs of the continuously increasing membership, a new educational unit was dedicated on February 22, 1959. This unit includes classrooms, a fellowship hall, a nursery, and a kitchen.

Grace Church stands now as did its predecessor 109 years ago [now 200 years ago] along the “turnpike leading to Safe Harbor” and “about one half mile west of the Normal School,” waiting to welcome all who come to worship therein.

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**Colleges and Seminaries**

In the late 1880s the *Religious Telescope* listed the following colleges and seminaries of the United Brethren Church.

- **Avalon College** – Avalon, Missouri
- **Dover Academy** – Dover, Illinois
- **Edwards Academy** – White Pine, Tennessee
- **Erie Conference Seminary** – Sugar Grove, Pennsylvania
- **Fostoria Academy** – Fostoria, Ohio
- **Green Hill Seminary** – Green Hill, Indiana
- **Gould College** – Harlan, Kansas (An article on this school appeared in the Summer 2011 issue of the *Telescope-Messenger.*)
- **Hartsville College** – Hartsville, Indiana
- **Lebanon Valley College** – Annville, Pennsylvania
- **Lane University** – Lecompton, Kansas
- **Otterbein University** – Westerville, Ohio
- **Philomath College** – Philomath, Oregon
- **Roanoke Academy** – Roanoke, Indiana
- **Shenandoah Institute** – Dayton, Virginia
- **Union Biblical Seminary** – Dayton, Ohio (United Theological Seminary)
- **Washington Seminary** – Huntsville, Washington Territory
- **Westfield College** – Westfield, Illinois
- **Western College** – Toledo, Iowa
- **West Virginia Academy and Normal School** – Buckhannon, West Virginia

Those in **bold type** are still in existence. Aside from those still in existence, can readers supply information on any of the other schools on this list? One of the currently largest former UB colleges, the University of Indianapolis, is not included on this list because it was not founded until 1903.
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