

A HISTORY OF HUS MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PART 4 CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA.

ADAPTED FROM A HISTORICAL TREATISE WRITTEN BY CHARLOTTE STELCIK



EARLY BEGINNINGS IN LINN COUNTY

In 1860 there were about 6,000 people in Cedar Rapids when Czech immigration began. By the middle of the 1860's there was a goodly number of Czech Protestants in Cedar Rapids. The first beginnings of religious worship were difficult for the Czechs because many of them severed their relations with the Catholic Church. These people were led by atheists who made the word Christian despised by the Czech people. Fanatic atheists roamed among the Czechs in Cedar Rapids preaching mostly concerning the denial of Christianity and claimed that the expedient plan would go back to Greek culture. For this reason the Cedar Rapids Czech community came to be called Czech Athens. Among the first immigrants there were very few Protestants. Many became

atheists because they were afraid to stand for the faith of their Hussite forefathers. They were known as the Evangelicals of the Reformed church. These people did not at first publicly espouse their religion but by holding meetings in their homes, they met and strengthened one another. Because of their poverty, it was years before they were able to afford a building in which to hold their religious services; therefore they met in homes to sing hymns to the accompaniment of a violin.

Occasionally these Protestants walked to Ely, nine miles from Cedar Rapids, to hear sermons by the Reverend Francis Kun, the minister of the Reformed Church in that rural community. This church, which had been organized in 1858, was the first Czech Protestant church in the United States.

Since the long trek to Ely was difficult for these people, they began to think of a place of their own for meeting. This couldn't be realized, though, because in 1869, F. B. Zdrubek, with his newspaper, "Pokrok," which means advancement, attacked the religious people, the word of God, and led the Czech people to the desecration of the Lord's Day in a disgraceful manner. It became a day for picnics, drinking, parties, which became so disgraceful that in many cases public officials had to take action. Only after this man left Cedar Rapids did the American people begin to notice the small group of Christians among the Czech and their efforts to establish a church.

In 1868 Miss E. J. Lund, a public school teacher, reported to her pastor, Reverend James Knox of the First Presbyterian Church, that only a few of her pupils attended any form of religious services. As a result a Sunday School for these Czech children was organized in July of that year and conducted in a small house on the corner of Seventh Avenue and Fifth Street near the Adams school. It was later held in two rooms of the Second Ward School. The whole congregation gladly accepted the friendly hand that was extended to them by Rev. Knox and some other of the English-speaking ministers in Cedar Rapids who took interest in the Czech people and served them. Our brethren began to meet in the old, empty building of the First Presbyterian Church. There they continued to hold services until the old church was torn down. To this old church Rev. Kun walked from Ely and preached three or four times a year.

After 1870, because the children lived too far away from the old First Presbyterian Church, attendance at the Sunday School decreased rapidly. Then in the year 1874, the Czech Evangelical people found a good friend in T. M. Sinclair, the owner of a packing plant where many of these people were employed. Sinclair was a devoted Christian and philanthropist. He gave the group fatherly care and because there was no better place, he made it possible for the group to meet in the factory in a shop where boxes were made. Here the congregation used boxes as seats and continued services for two years. Sinclair encouraged Czech Protestants to persevere in their efforts and invited workers to services; furthermore, in 1877 he built the Hope Mission Chapel (Third Presbyterian Church) on the hill in back of Saint Wenceslaus Church. Here at three o'clock Sunday School classes were taught in the English language, and at four o'clock church services were conducted in Czech. Rev. Kun came occasionally to preach and with the support of Sinclair, the little group increased and prospered.

During that same year, Rev. J. E. Szalatnay, superintendent of the Reformed churches in Bohemia, visited the Cedar Rapids congregation. Mr. Sinclair tried to persuade him to remain as the local pastor and even guaranteed him a salary, but Rev. Szalatnay found it impossible to comply with this urgent request. Because it was impossible for him to remain in Cedar Rapids, he searched for a preacher in Europe, mainly in Edinburgh, where Czech theologians studied, but he met with no success.

24-25 I urge you to pray for absolutely everything, ranging from small to large. Include everything as you embrace this God-life, and you'll get God's everything. And when you assume the posture of prayer, remember that it's not all asking. If you have anything against someone, forgive—only then will your heavenly Father be inclined to also wipe your slate clean of sins."

Mark 11:24-25 (MSG)

Two years later, on September 12th, with the aid of Mr. Sinclair, this little group of Protestants formally organized a Czech Reformed Church with Frank Nemecek, Jan Dudycha, and Karl Hromatka as their first elders. Services continued in the Hope Mission Chapel, conducted either by visiting ministers or by elders. Finally a Russian, Rev. Bonekemp, who offered to preach to the Czech congregation, came to the city at the expense of Mr. Sinclair. Since Rev. Bonekemp's knowledge of the Czech language was poor, it was only with difficulty that the members of the congregation were able to understand him. Because of that difficulty his work was not successful. He preached his last sermon July 2, 1882. In the meantime Mr. Sinclair's sudden death on March 24, 1881 brought sorrow to the congregation who he had so ably assisted.

After Rev. Bonekemp's brief pastorate, the church was often aided by Rev. Edward R. Burkhalter, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church. From 1883 to 1890 Rev. Kun again preached in the Hope Mission Chapel once a month. When he came, services were well attended. Other people who conducted services during that time were Rev. Schaffler of Oberlin College; John Rundus, John Musil, and F. T. Bastel, theological students at Oberlin; and Frank Rundus from Park College in Missouri.

Because of Him ~ Terry

PS: Don't forget to bring \$1 each week to youth group for Wolia!

Upcoming Calendar

February

3 rd	Youth serving Sunday Evening Meal at 1st Presbyterian Church, Cedar Rapids - 4 - 6 PM
6 th	Ash Wednesday Movie Night starts at 5:15 PM. Get to the youth room early for a seat, as we will start at 5:15 PM with prayer, pizza, pop, and the movie. Please bring \$3 to help cover cost of the pizza and pop.
9 th	Hus Racing League (HRL) 2008 Season begins. Registration at 9:30 AM, racing at 10.
12 th	President Lincoln's Birthday
13 th	Youth Group (Meal at 5:15 PM, gather at 5:45 PM)
14 th	Valentine's Day
18 th	President's Day
20 th	Youth Group (Meal at 5:15 PM, gather at 5:45 PM)
22 nd	President Washington's Birthday
23 rd	Youth volunteering at the JDRF Walk at Westdale Mall from 8 AM - Noon
26 th	Youth Ministry Parents Meeting, 8 PM at the Collins Road Panera Bread
27 th	Youth Group (Meal at 5:15 PM, gather at 5:45 PM)

Every Monday: Youth Prayer Time, 7 PM from where ever you are.

Every Wednesday: Marion High School Bible study at 7 AM.

Every Friday:

- ✠ Breakfast Club at Kennedy High School, Room 162 beginning at 7 AM. For more information contact Bob Dye at 393-7996 or email him at bob@eiayfc.com.
- ✠ Marion High School Bible study at 3 PM.

Times subject to change.

Events not scheduled yet will be announced as far in advance as possible so you can make plans to attend.

A Moment With God

Lord Jesus, We confess that we have held ill feelings and resentments against people. We call upon you and ask you to help us to forgive people, groups, institutions, churches, governments, and ourselves. We ask you Father, in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to drop in our minds and bring to our remembrance the name of anyone or anything, whose actions or words real or imagined hurt us, or another person for which we hold or have held ill feelings and resentments, hate, envy, malice, vengeance, unforgiveness, bitterness or grudges against. Father, as you forgave us when we did not deserve to be forgiven, so likewise, we forgive, whether they deserve it or not; in Jesus name, Amen.

Author Unknown

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