

## A Brief History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ – DOC)

The Christian Church began as two separate threads, each without knowledge of the other. **Barton W. Stone** led the first group (Kentucky) who called themselves simply Christians. **Thomas Campbell and son Alexander** began the second group in (the now) West Virginia. Both groups split from their respective Presbyterian churches.

**Believers had more in common than they had differences.**

In 1832, the two groups met in Lexington, Kentucky to explore a way to combine. Both groups wanted **unity** and believed that accepting Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, and Lord was all that was needed to become faithful followers.

Both were opposed to creeds – the Bible, especially the **New Testament** was all that was necessary and led to the following decisions:

**Scripture** is read from both the Old and the New Testaments.  
**Baptism** was for adults only (not infants) and was by immersion.  
**Music** was encouraged.  
The **local church** conducts its own business.  
**Communion** is open to all who confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.  
**Sunday** is the “first day of the week.”  
The **Lord’s Supper** will be held every Sunday.

**Compromise** was needed to name the new movement; therefore, it is now known as the **Christian Church (Disciples of Christ.)** It continues to proclaim ***“Unity is still its polar star.”***

## **In the beginning . . .**

. . . one hundred disciples were brought together in the small town of Sebring, Florida by Charles W. Rogers of West Virginia. He was instrumental in purchasing the land for a church, with financial help from C. V. Hudson. Both of these men were uncles of Libby Graddy (husband Ray).

They now had land and soon had a pastor – Rev. Orilas G. White – but still lacked a building. They met at the open pavilion at Tuscawilla Park. See today's bulletin.

The growing city had need of a new courthouse and Rogers made a deal with the county – the discarded building materials could be purchased for the cost of transporting it, which cost one hundred dollars. The other cost was pulling nails out of the used lumber.

The "Disciples" planned to duplicate the efforts of the Methodist Church, which was "built in a day" in 1913. This church was erected on grounds given by George Sebring who offered free lots to all churches when he first arrived in 1911 to build his Christian town.

So the new DOC church was not built in a day because the volunteers found the lumber in such good shape, they decided to build a permanent building, which took about six weeks.

The building was completed and the first service held April 10, 1927, just one year after the first service at Tuscawilla Park. This building was replaced by our present day sanctuary by February, 1965.

The first personage was build on the same property, but facing Poinsettia, and was first occupied in 1948 by Rev. Cull. The Durrance two- story home next to the sanctuary on Eucalyptus Street was purchased in 1967, to become the next personage by 1976. The third personage was purchased in 1980, address was on Taseschee Street. The latter two personages were sold; at this time, housing is no longer provided by the church.

The picture is of the May 7, 1964 ground breaking of the new sanctuary. G. V. Hudson is wielding the shower and to the left is Thomas W. Jones, then Ada Muff, then Mrs. Hudson and Mrs. Long. William Sager is at the extreme left and Fred Pletcher, at the extreme right.



## THE CHURCH OF THE LEANING CROSS

### FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH Sebring, Florida

Jesus said, "If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps, he must give up all right to himself, carry his cross every day and keep close behind me. For the one who wants to save his life will lose it, but the one who loses his life for my sake will save it." *Matt. 16: 24-25*

The cross in our sanctuary represents your cross. It is leaning at the angle you would take it up to carry on the Christian Way of life. Jesus promises no easy Way, indeed it may be as hard and rough as the brick you see before you. But we walk not alone: at the Table of our Lord is our strength renewed each week through the Lord's Supper, and from the pulpit come the words of Scripture and of guidance as we travel the Way. Beneath the cross and at the entrance to the Way is baptism. Here we find the beautiful and simple reenactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. The new follower goes down into the water, is buried beneath its surface, and in faith is raised into new and holy life.

Ours is a frontier faith, born in the outposts of Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois and Indiana early in the nineteenth century. Now, the largest religious movement originating on American soil, we still find direction in the guiding principles which set us apart more than 150 years ago. Barton W. Stone, Alexander Campbell, and numerous other leaders asserted the way to the unity of all Christ's followers lay in restoring the church of the New Testament in its teachings, practices and simplicity. They Protested the sectarianism which had divided and weakened the church. They called on men to believe in Christ, make public confession of their faith - "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and my personal savior" - and in obedience to Him, to be immersed in baptism.

From our history come such beliefs as "Not the only Christians, but Christians only," "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible," "This is the Lord's table, He invites all who believe," and "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, brotherly love."

Membership in this congregation is through confession of faith and baptism; transfer of membership, having been immersed elsewhere; or associate membership for those so desire further information.

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## A YOUNG CHURCH IN A YOUNG CITY

By Veora Eastman

First Christian Church of Sebring really had its beginning in Augusta, W. Va. When Charles W. Rogers began plans to move his home from West Virginia to Florida, he also planned for a church home in Sebring. He and his family moved to the Sunshine State in 1919 and attended the Church of the Brethren for a few years.

Before leaving the north Mr. Rogers discussed his dreams with the Rev. O. G. White, a veteran minister and church administrator, who had been successful in launching several congregations.

At the time of his original visit in 1925, Mr. White was able to look over the City of Sebring and the site of the church he was to build.

Mr. Rogers and his brother-in-law, G. V. Hudson, had purchased the southeast corner lot at Poinsettia and Eucalyptus Street for \$8,000. Although the dreamed of congregation had land, it had no building. Rogers, through articles and ads in the local newspaper, announced plans for founding a congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

When Mr. White moved to Sebring in 1926 services were held in a recreation building at Tusawilla Park, where Sebring City Hall now stands.

In his autobiography he described those early years of the building of a new church in a town hardly 15 years old, itself.

On returning from War I, I promised Charles W. Rogers of Augusta, W. Va., who was moving to Sebring, Fla., that sooner or later I would come to Sebring to help his establish a church there.

In the fall of 1925 he asked me to come to investigate the matter. In November, while I was there, he and G. V. Hudson bought the lot where the church now stands.

We had found about 100 members of northern churches when we began, but as the summer came on and the boom had become a thing of the past. these numbers began to depart to their old homes and the number remaining was one-fourth the number at the beginning.

The membership was very discouraged and had opposed any move to build at that time. At last I appealed to them to let me try and prove that I could find a way at least to put up a temporary structure. They agreed to let me try.

At that time the courthouse was being finished, and a workman came to me and said, 'I took an option on the scaffolding lumber at the courthouse for \$100. Can you raise the money?' We had the \$100.

I pulled nails for three weeks and at a cost of \$1.40 (cost of gasoline) the lumber was hauled to the lot. There were three carloads of it and very little had been damaged.

In this connection we will never forget the contractor and his family. (One son, Derward Phipps, is a member of the church).

We had published the plan 'to erect in a day'a temporary building and the workmen did not know until they came that we had decided that the lumber was too good to be used as a temporary structure and we were building for permanency.

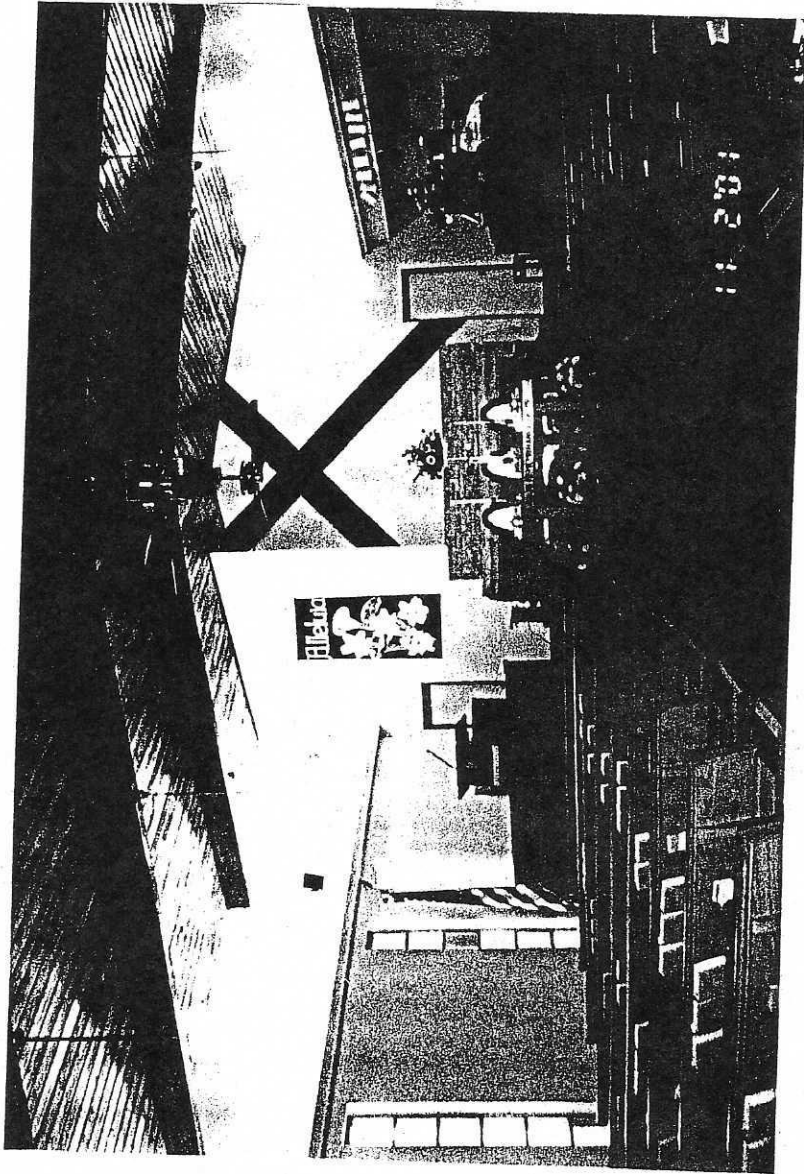
In six weeks the building was finished and opened for use the tenth day of April 1927, just about a year from the day of the first service.

The rev. O. G. White was minister of the Sebring church for five years going from here to Bartow. He and Mrs. White were among the 17 charter members who firmly established a heritage of community involvement and service for the growing congregation..

## **OUR SANCTUARY**

*The sanctuary of the First Christian Church of Sebring was designed to picture the Christian Way of Life. The focal point represents the cross of each Christian, leaning at the angle one would take it up to carry. The brick at its base and (original) texture of walls and ceiling reminded us of the roughness of the Way. The brick encloses the baptistry, for baptism is at the entrance to the Way. We walk not alone. At the Table of our Lord is our strength renewed each week through the Lord's Supper. The appointment on the table remind us that Christ is the goal toward which we move and the light unto our path. From the pulpit come the words of Scripture and of guidance as we travel the Way. The rough-hewn and weathered appearance of the cross remind us of our frontier beginnings, as do the meeting-house bench-style pews. Most of the architectural lines of the room focus the attention on cross and table.*

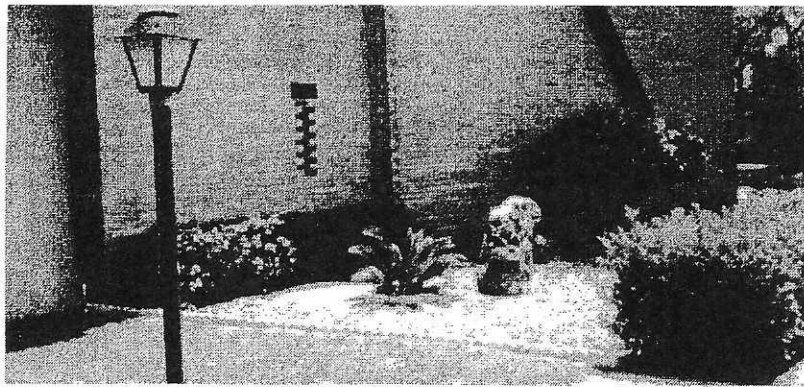




MINISTERS WHO HAVE SERVED FIRST CHRISTIAN

Mrs. P. M. Kendall, Rev. J. Boyd Jones, and R. M. Jones have all served First Christian, but the exact dates of ministry are not recorded.

Rev. O. G. White	Founding Pastor	1926-1931
Rev. M. M. Austin		1933
Rev. W. D. Ward		1934
Rev. Robt. Glenn		1936-1937
Rev. Williams		1946
Rev. O. K. Cull		1948-1949
Rev. William Burner		1953-1955
Dr. Manley Morton		1955
Rev. John Whidden		1955-1958
Rev. Tom Jones		1958-1981
Rev. Reynolds Lewis	(Interim)	1981
Rev. Luther Cole	(Interim)	1982
Rev. Elry Jeffries		1982-1986
Rev. Dan F. Reihing		1986-1998
Rev. Robert Hutson		1998-2000
Rev. John Koehler	(Interim)	2000
Rev. Johan Van der Merwe		2001-5
Rev. Juanita Roberts	(supply)	2005
Rev. Ron Norton		2005-



**“The Holy Land Garden” was developed in 1965 with funds provided by the David Jones family. This is now referred to as the Memorial Garden. The Memorial Plaque at the sanctuary entrance memorializes those who have gone to be with the Lord. Following is a list of deceased members:**

Alma “Kaye” Koerner  
Barbara Penniston  
Bernard D. Frink  
Beulah “Bea” Vosburgh  
David H. Hayes  
Elizabeth Hedlee  
Eugene L. Moore  
Evola Croft  
Fred Penniston  
Floyd A. Ferrin  
Francis A. Bourique  
Frank A. Duane  
Garold F. Shepherd  
Geneva Shepherd  
Grace A. Duane  
Helen M. Farnsworth  
Irene Ferrin  
John H. McQueen  
Joseph Perfetto  
Katherine Hubbell

Kathryn Fritsch  
Kathryn Magnuson  
L. Audrey Hayes  
Laura Nicholson  
Luther M. Cole  
Mable Bournique  
Olga Lockwood Cole  
Opel B. Whitehead  
Richard W. Farnsworth  
Robert Hubbell  
Robert M. Sleeth  
Ruby E. McQueen  
Ruth G. Sleeth  
Stephen E. Vosburgh  
Theophile Frink  
Thomas G. Nason  
Thomas M. Pudlosky  
Vernon Koerner  
Wayne Magnuson