

## **Notes on how our Churches started- from “Church of the Brethren in Southern Illinois”, Brethren Publishing House, Elgin, IL, 1950**

A reading of the Church histories and the variety of events leading to their initial organizations revealed the following from notes taken while reading the accounts.

There was some kind of **GATHERING** of people coming together.

The **WORD** and **PRAYER** were involved.

**OUTREACH** was seen. Searched out other Brethren, Neighbors told, Tent meetings, Aid Society, Appeals/Announcements placed in publications, elected Visiting Brothers, Love Feast called, Preaching points established, Conference supported Mission point, Sunday School started.

**LEADERS** emerged. Core founding families, Elders came, traveling Speakers, Ministers called in, Pastor settled.

**ORGANIZATION** meeting occurred.

**PARSONAGE** and/or **MEETINGHOUSE** established with Dedications and Revivals.

The general pattern seen in all the accounts is found in the capitalized words and indicates an overall flow of events. Not all the histories contain each specific activity, as each Church history reveals various combinations of the above events taking place.

(51) Church histories are recorded in the book. A number of the Churches are no longer in existence. But, as you read, you start to see similarities in how they came about, so I identified some categories and tallied them in an effort to look for patterns.

These (6) basic categories were identified and tallied.

26 each. D/P – Divided/Planted - came from another Church, which grew large and divided and/or families from it organized & planted another Church.

10 each. F – Families - from families who knew each other and had recently settled together in an area.

8 each. M – Minister - minister was present initially.

4 each. G – Gathered Brethren - gathered other Brethren in area, who they did not know, after settling themselves.

2 each. A – Administration - annual/district conference held there and local mission point followed.

1 each. H – Harvest – directly from the harvest, baptisms also spoken of in 6 other histories before organizing.

Each category is a reflection of evangelism. How else did the 26 that divided/planted grow so large? Or any that still exist continue to exist? Did those that closed simply fail to evangelize, and thus plateau and decline? What was their style of evangelism? And -Is is still relevant in the context of our world today?

It is said that Brethren do evangelism differently, by inviting people into community. A community in relationship with Christ, and each other, as we continue the work of Jesus in the world around us. This is more of an ongoing hospitality model of life change than the emotional admit you're a sinner - walk the aisle model.

Some of the phrases used which spoke to me and unique items of interest were:

- Big Creek - Walnut Grove 1859 Richland County. Quote “After I was there awhile, I thought I saw a brother on the road”, gathered Brethren, called for a Love Feast, 27 came, 6 baptisms.
- elected Visiting Brothers to make contacts.
- held Love Feast before officially organizing.
- Cumberland County 1869, felt certain that other Brethren settlers were in area, published announcement in *Christian Family Companion* announcing Love Feast to be held, later published appeals for speakers.
- Camp Creek, accounts in *Gospel Messenger* of annual visits prior to Council meeting.
- Pigeon Creek – Oak Grove, family settled, District sent mission ministers to work/preach on 1 year stint, 3 preaching points, used tents, coordinated social meetings, organized with 13 members.
- Appeals placed in local publications.
- St. Louis, Mo. planter model, preaching point of John Metzger, annual meeting funded building.
- Kaskaskia – Brethren members from area, held “protracted meetings” coordinated by 2 men, 15 baptisms, organized w/ 28 members, held 2 prayer meetings a week.
- Annual conference held in city having no established Brethren presence, local mission points followed.
- Champaign, IL, a ministers family settled there, began looking for Brethren, gathered then found public place to worship, 15 met, asked mission board to assist, tent meetings net 15 ascensions.
- Union County 1811, from the harvest model, great New Madrid earthquake sparked awakening, revivals, 14 Brethren inquirers at work, called in Brethren ministers to baptize, held meetings and organized.

Persons often named in accounts of initial organizing were George Wolfe, John Metzger and George Gish. Probably others I did not catch as a repeated name since there were a lot of names, kind of like the Old Testament!

Publications mentioned in the accounts:

- Brethren in Northern Il and Wisconsin
- Brethren at Work
- Primitive Christian and Pilgrim
- Christian Family Companion
- The Life of Uncle John Metzger

If you have copies of any of these, a show and tell would be appreciated. Feb 2006. TML