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A History of the Congregational Methodist Church From 1957 to 1973

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A HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL METHODIST CHURCH
FROM 1957 TO 1973

A Graduate Research Project

Presented to
the Faculty of
Western Evangelical Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Divinity

by
Daniel Wayne Rhodes
May 1973

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

During the past two centenaries there have been several Methodist bodies formed either by a split off of, or as a result of the influence of Methodism started under John Wesley. However, in the past forty years there has been an ecumenical movement to reunite many of these bodies. The Congregational Methodist Church is one of the Methodist bodies that has not been included in this ecumenical trend. Disagreement on aspects of doctrine and a distaste for the episcopal form of government are the major reasons for the Congregational Methodist Church not involving themselves in this ecumenical trend. Thus, the Congregational Methodist Church, whose doctrine is Methodist and government republican, has spread its message all across the southern part of the United States.

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

It was the purpose of this study to trace the development of and write a history of the Congregational Methodist Church from 1957 to the present time.

Justification of the Problem₂

O. C. McDaniel in his book The Origin and Early History of the Congregational Methodist Church covers the development of the church up until about 1875. Wilton R. Fowler, Jr. in a thesis entitled A History of the Congregational Methodist Church, presented to the faculty of Department of History at Stephen F. Austin State College, covers the development of the church up until 1957. Not including the Minutes of the General Conference, which gives statistics and factual information about the church, and the church periodical, the Messenger, no complete history has ever been published of the Congregational Methodist Church since 1957. Thus the writer felt that a written history of the church, from 1957 to the present, would be very beneficial to the church in preserving its development during this time, as well as aid the church in planning for the future.

The General Conference president and the General Conference Secretary have both encouraged the writing of this history.

Limitations of the Problem

This study investigated the history of the Congregational Methodist Church from 1957 to the present. A brief study of the church and its departments prior to 1957 was done only as it related to the development of the church during the stated time.

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

The Local Church

The local church is a local body of believers of the Congregational Methodist Church. They have organizational ties with the general church as it advances up through the various conferences.

The District Conference

The district conference is a given area inside an annual conference and contains all the churches found therein. This conference meets once a year to transact its business.

The Annual Conference

The Annual conference is made up of two or more district conferences in a given area. It meets once a year to transact its business.

The General Conference

The General Conference is the largest administrative body of the Congregational Methodist Church. It is composed of delegates as they come up through the various conferences from the local church. It meets once every four years to conduct its business.

General Conference President

The General Conference President is the administrative officer of the General Conference. His responsibilities are little more than moderator of the General

SOURCES OF DATA

The sources of any research are important. The major sources of information for this research are four.

General Conference Minutes

The General Conference Minutes is a compilation of transactions that have taken place at the General Conference level of the Congregational Methodist Church. They gave valuable information throughout the paper.

Messenger

The Messenger is the official journal of the Congregational Methodist Church. It is issued weekly each Saturday except Saturday of Christmas and Saturday following the fourth Saturday in June. News releases appearing in it were investigated as they related to the study.

Personal Correspondence

Personal correspondence was conducted with present and past General Conference officials and all the General Department leaders. Seven out of twelve letters were returned with varying amounts of information.

Personal Interviews

Two personal interviews were conducted with the officials of World Gospel Mission. This was done to gain information on the status of Congregational Method-

ist Missionaries under the World Gospel Mission Board.

STATEMENT OF ORGANIZATION

Chapter one introduces the reader to the subject.

Chapter two gives a brief history of the Congregational Methodist Church from its beginning to 1957.

Chapter three gives the major business transactions and issues before the General Conferences which convened during the time studied.

Chapter four is a history of the development of the Department of Publications of the Congregational Methodist Church.

Chapter five gives a history of the development of Westminster College.

Chapter six gives a history of the foreign missionary activity of the Congregational Methodist Church.

Chapter seven gives a history of the Home Missions Department.

Chapter eight gives the development of the Department of Christian Education.

Chapter nine gives a summary and some conclusions, and closes the research.

Chapter 2

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL METHODIST CHURCH FROM ITS BEGINNING TO 1957

Chapter 2

THE FOUNDING OF THE CONGREGATIONAL METHODIST CHURCH

The Congregational Methodist Church is a church with Methodist doctrine and a republican form of government. It was organized in 1852, but has its roots deep in Methodism. For many years prior to its foundation there had been a growing desire within the Methodist Church for a church with a congregational form of government. Thus, the major reason for the creation of the Congregational Methodist Church was governmental rather than doctrinal.

Five reasons for dissatisfaction with the episcopal government were stated for the withdrawal from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: (1) the inefficiency of the itinerant system, as then practiced, of large circuits and generally week-day preaching at country churches, declaring that the preaching to walls and benches would never evangelize the mass of the people; (2) the danger of a government where the whole power was in the same hands; (3) the impropriety of depriving the people of a voice in their own government; (4) the unscriptural character of the invidious distinction made by the laws of the Methodist Episcopal Church,

South between the itinerant and local divisions of their ministers; (5) that there was no reason to suppose these features of the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, would be changed soon if ever.¹

On May 8, 1852, in the parlor of Brother Mackleberry Merritt, in Monroe County, Georgia the Congregational Methodist Church was organized. Twelve men made up the delegation, three were local preachers, who made the initial step.

Rev. Hiram Phinazee, a local preacher, was one of the leaders of the group. He was forty-nine at the time, but was twenty-one when he moved to Monroe County, Georgia. He was licensed to preach in 1839, after being an exhorter for some time. He had studied well and had become a very informed person of the community, holding some public offices, in addition to his preaching ministry.²

Rev. Absalom Ogletree, also met with the group to organize the church. He was a local preacher as well as being a successful farmer. He showed great skill in farming, but never became rich, because he believed that his principal business was ministering to the

¹Rev. S. C. McDaniel, The Origin and Early History of the Congregational Methodist Church (Atlanta, Georgia: Jas. P. Harrison & Co., Printers & Publishers, 1881) p. 6.

²Wilten R. Fowler, Jr., "A History of the Congregational Methodist Church" (unpublished Master's thesis, Stephen F. Austin State College, 1957), p. 17.

spiritual needs of people. He was very strict, but much respected by his family and slaves.³

Rev. W. H. Graham was another local preacher who met with the group. He did not get a formal education, but was known for his spiritual strength and high character. He was often referred to as a 'diamond in the rough'.

Among the group were some very distinguished laymen of the community. Their names are W. L. Fambro, Jackson Bush, John Flynt, James M. Fleming, George W. Todd, Robinson Fambro, Mackleberry Merritt, Travis Ivey, and Elbert Jones Banks.⁴

Many others had expressed interest and desire for the organization of such a church, but were unable to attend this meeting.

The Meeting on May 8, 1852, was organized by calling William L. Fambrough, a layman, to the chair, and Rev. H. Phinazee to act as secretary. The meeting was opened by prayer by Rev. William Graham. This meeting adopted a preamble and several resolutions, drawn up by Rev. Hiram Phinazee, then they adjourned.⁵

The preamble and resolutions adopted at this meeting are probably nonexistence or it is impossible to

³Ibid., p. 18. ⁴Ibid., p. 16.

⁵McDaniel, op. cit., p. 5.

find them. But the resolutions did express the intention of establishing a church whose doctrine would be exactly Methodistic, but whose government would be in accordance with civil institutions and their ideas of propriety. Thus, declaring this, they set to the breeze the sail of the Congregational Methodist Church.⁶

After the organization on May 8, 1852, the first church was organized that same month, called the Rocky Creek Church. The first district conference was held in August of that same year. By the time of the district conference six other churches were organized and presented themselves to the district conference. These churches, all from central Georgia, were Rock Spring, New Market, Providence, Mount Hope, New Hope and Pleasant Grove.⁷

The work of this district conference was small. They licensed Mr. Carey Cox to preach and passed a resolution which has been the practice of the church up to the present time. The resolution stated that upon presentation of proper credentials, all ministers from ~~orthodox denominations would be received as such into~~ the Congregational Methodist Church.

This conference, also appointed a committee to consider establishing a printing press.⁸

⁶Ibid., p. 6. ⁷Ibid., p. 12.

⁸Fowler, op. cit., p. 57.

This district conference was of great significance to all Methodist. This was the first conference in any Methodist body where the delegation was composed more largely of laymen than of ministers, and those making up the delegation were there purely by the choice of their brethren. Laymen shared the same privileges as did the ministers. The officers of the body were on a perfect equality with every other member, except for those privileges conferred on them by the body. Since that time many other Methodist groups have organized on the equality principle.⁹

The second district conference was held in December, 1852. At this conference four more churches were received into the fellowship, two being from Alabama.

The church continued to grow and in May, 1853 a district conference had been organized in Alabama, and in July of that same year the first Congregational Methodist Church was organized in Mississippi. During the next few years the church continued to grow with many churches joining the fellowship. Some of them newly organized and others joining, were from dissatisfied groups.

In 1856 the first state conference was held with two district conferences represented. It was from this

⁹McDaniel, op. cit., p. 13.

state conference that delegates were elected to the first General Conference, which was held that same year at the Mt. Zion Church in Monroe County, Georgia.¹⁰

The growth of the church was hindered by the Civil War. The war destroyed many of the churches and made it impossible for the General Conference of 1864 to meet.

After the Civil War the church was faced with the problem of former slaves. Many of the members were slave owners, including some of the ministers. The following is a statement which expresses the position which the church took concerning negroes: "...we cordially invite them who obtained a membership in our churches to remain with us and continue in a Christian demeanor."¹¹ However, feelings of doubt were expressed as whether they were on the same social and intellectual level.

Following the Civil War the church grew on its own initiative. There was no organized program for church extension. The dispersion of the church was caused primarily by its members moving to different sections of the country and starting churches where they settled. However, the church did spread to Texas, Tennessee,

¹⁰Fowler, op. cit., p. 62.

¹¹Minutes of the Georgia State Conference, 1866. As quoted in Wilten R. Fowler, Jr., "A History of the Congregational Methodist Church" (unpublished Master's thesis, Stephen F. Austin State College, 1957), p. 65.

Louisiana, Florida and Missouri.

The expansion of the church to Missouri is typical of its growth to other states. Several ministers, near Marquand, Missouri, were dissatisfied with the episcopacy and itineracy of their church. One of these, Rev. Ruben Watts, read an editorial in the Christian Advocate about the government of the Congregational Methodist church and was very impressed with its system of government. He wrote for information concerning the church. Some books of discipline were sent to him which he studied very carefully. This led to the organization of the first Congregational Methodist church in Missouri near Patton, Missouri. Within the next two weeks Rev. Watts had organized two more churches in nearby communities.¹²

Period of Controversy

By 1880 the Church had reached its top without a more central government. Many churches were becoming dissatisfied and withdrew from the church. Rev. S. C. McDaniel started a movement to merge with the Free Methodist Protestant Church. This caused more dissatisfaction among the churches resulting in a greater pull out. The loss of interest is shown in the dis-

¹²McDaniel, op. cit., p. 29.

continuing of the church paper, which was the only factor of unity of the church. The loss of churches during the 1880's is estimated at about one third.¹³

Interest began to grow again in the 1890's. This was attributed to two factors. First the reestablishment of the church periodical and the employment of a state missionary.

In 1889 Rev. Rolf Hunt became a very important leader in the Congregational Methodist Church. He was a well known preacher and was probably one of the best trained persons in the church at that time. After becoming editor of the church paper he established a publishing house and Bible school in Atlanta, Georgia.

The leadership of Rev. Hunt in the publishing house and Bible school brought the church to a peak in 1909. At that time about fifteen thousand members were reported to the General Conference. However, the publishing house and Bible school soon collapsed because of a financial disruption. This was a great loss to the church resulting in many churches becoming dissatisfied and dropping from the fellowship.¹⁴

The period following this trouble left the church in a rather static age. From 1909 to 1941 the church

¹³Fowler, op. cit., p. 77. ¹⁴Ibid., p. 83.

had periods of growth and periods of depression.

In the 1930's there arose a controversy over the doctrine of sanctification as a second work of grace. Rev. J. A. Cook, the president of the General Conference, was bitterly opposed to the doctrine, while Rev. W. A. Hartgraves, the editor of the Messenger, was a strong advocate of it.

In the 1933 General Conference some revisions were adopted which included some statements about sanctification as a second work of grace. These had to be ratified by the district conferences. As the district conferences sent in the ballots the editor of the Messenger, Rev. W. H. Hartgraves claimed the secretary of the General Conference destroyed some of the ballots. He claimed the resolutions passed and went ahead and printed the new discipline which included the resolutions. This caused an uproar and a called session of the General Conference in 1934. In this conference the resolutions passed in the previous conference were declared illegal and the newly printed discipline declared void.¹⁵

This controversy continued to mount until the 1941 conference when it came to a head. This conference was

¹⁵Quotation from personal correspondence between Dr. Marvin Sheffield, President of General Conference from 1941 to 1960, and the writer.

sharply divided with the holiness element, those believing in sanctification as a second work of grace, were in the majority, but those of the other persuasion were in the executive authority. An agreement was proposed for a division. A voice vote was taken. The holiness element demanded a standing vote. That is when Rev. J. A. Cook and his followers walked out.

Rev. Marvin Sheffield, then editor of the Messenger, describes the situation: "Rev. J. A. Cook said, 'You see that door', pointing to a side door in the church. 'I am walking out that door, and all who want to walk out with me can do so.' After he started, Rev. J. E. Helder asked him, 'what about the records, Bro. Cook?' He replied, 'we are leaving them.'"¹⁶

Rev. J. A. Cook later denied his actions and claimed that the holiness element walked out and organized a new church. But the holiness element kept the records and are the original General Conference. Since the president and vice-president walked out the secretary presided over the meeting and reorganized the conference. This was when Dr. Sheffield was elected president.¹⁷

Some of the annual conferences stayed with the Original General Conference, others went with those who walked out and some remained neutral awhile. Those who

¹⁶Ibid. ¹⁷Ibid.

remained neutral soon came back into the original conference. Since that time to the present, local churches have been coming back.

The split in 1941 was a great blessing to the church. After the split the church experienced a unity that it had not enjoyed for many years. Within the next four years the church had established a Foreign Missions program, established a Bible school and greatly improved the Publishing Department. The split, also aided the church to establish for the first time its position on the doctrine of sanctification. With these major achievements the church was able to set a precedence of growth which has been continued to this day.

Chapter 3

THE GENERAL CONFERENCES FROM 1957 TO 1969

Chapter 3

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH FROM 1957 TO 1969

After the church gained its strength from the split of 1941, it began to make progress. This called for some changes in the structure of the church in order to coordinate its growing ministry. During this period of history, from 1957-1969, the church underwent tremendous change as the discussion will show.

The Piedmont Alabama Conference

The General Conference of 1957 met in the Y M C A Auditorium in Peidmont, Alabama. This conference drew delegates from all across Congregational Methodistism, with two new annual conferences represented. There was a group of twenty-three churches from the former Methodist Protestant Church who united with the church as a new annual from Mississippi. A newly organized annual from West Tennessee also united with the church.¹⁸

Officers elected were Dr. Marvin Sheffield, president; Rev. W. E. Bruce, vice-president; and Rev. W. T. Stevens, secretary.

¹⁸ General Conference Minutes of the Congregational Methodist Church, 1957, pp.18-19.

This General Conference was a time of reconstruction for the Congregational Methodist Church. Several revisions were made in the church structure on the local level as well as on the General Conference level.

A more definite plan for the structure and officers of the local church was passed. The officials of the local church were changed to include; a pastor, a church leader, one or more deacons, three or more stewards, a secretary, an assistant secretary, a treasurer, an assistant treasurer, three or more trustees, a Sunday School superintendent, one or more assistant Sunday School superintendents, a C. M. Y. S. president, one or more C. M. Y. S. vice-presidents, a W. M. S. president, one or more W. M. S. vice-presidents, a prayer band leader, a Junior prayer band leader, a president of the Men's Fellowship and a vice-president of the Men's Fellowship. The duties of these local officials were outlined as follows:

1. The duties of the pastor shall be to take pastoral charge of the church; to be responsible to the church for appointments as prescribed in the call, and cooperate with the church in providing someone to fill his pulpit in his absence; to ordain deacons; and to administer the ordinances of the church; act as the presiding officer in church conferences; also the pastor shall be an advisory member to all committees and boards of the church.

2. The duties of the church leader are to act as the spiritual leader of the church in the absence of the pastor in those churches which do not have full time pastors. It is his responsibility in such churches to see that services such as Sunday School, C. M. Y. S. and prayer meeting are conducted and are begun on time in

absence of the pastor. In the absence of the pastor, the church leader may preside over the church conference, or the church may elect someone else when it is necessary. The church leader shall always act under the direction of the pastor, and shall assist the pastor whenever the pastor requests such assistance.

3. It shall be the duty of the deacons to aid the minister in the administration of the sacraments of the Lord's supper, and to promote a program of visitation, principally among the sick, aged, and shut-ins.

4. It shall be the duty of the stewards to attend to the financial affairs of the church. They shall meet and organize soon after their election and elect a chairman, a vice-chairman, secretary, and an assistant secretary. They shall meet previous to the monthly conference and make full report of the financial affairs, and make recommendations on financial matters to the church conference for approval, amendment, etc. It also shall be the duty of the board of stewards to promote Christian stewardship in the church under the direction of the pastor.

5. It shall be the duty of the secretary to attend all conferences if the church and minute its proceedings in ink in the book to be kept for future reference; and register in the same the names of all members, distinguishing by separate columns the date of admission, deaths, removals by letter, dismissals, baptisms; adult and infant, etc.

6. It shall be the duty of the trustees to secure and hold in trust the proper deeds of all church property for the church.

7. In each local church there shall be an executive committee consisting of the following church officials: the pastor, the church leader, the church secretary, the chairman of the board of stewards, the senior deacon, the Sunday School superintendent, and an official representative of the C. M. Y. S. and the W. M. S. The pastor shall be the chairman of this committee. It shall be the duty of this committee to promote the work of the local church under the general direction of the pastor. This committee shall promote evangelism, missions, Christian education, church extension, lay activities, and other enterprises as directed by the District, Annual, and General Conference.

In cooperation with the deacons, it shall minister to the sick, the needy, and the distressed of the community. In its regular meeting it shall consider the over-all work and progress of the church and make recommendations for improvement to the appropriate committee of board, or to the church conference if it is deemed necessary.¹⁹

The qualifications of the officials of the local church consist of the following:

1. A clear witness of the new birth.
2. A possessor or seeker of sanctification.
3. Living a consistent Christian life according to the Word of God.
4. A member of the church in good standing.²⁰

Another major change in the structure of the church was on the general level. The Advisory Committee was created to provide for an annual meeting of the various boards, departments and annual conference chairman to better coordinate the plans and programs of the church. The duties of this committee were: (1) to assist and advise with president of the General Conference, (2) to work as a coordinating committee to the various Annual Conferences in promoting the General Conference programs, (3) to serve as a clearing body for the activities of the General Conference president not otherwise specified, (4) to assist the Executive Secretary and the General Boards in the execution of plans of the church boards formulated in the quadrennial period following the

¹⁹Constitution and Government of the Congregational Methodist Church, eleventh edition, (Dallas, Texas; The Messenger Press, 1960), pp. 19-22.

²⁰Ibid., p. 22.

resurrected at the Great White Throne Judgement."²²²⁵

Another issue before this General Conference was that of integration. Following is a resolution adopted by the 1957 General Conference.

"We take our stand on the Bible and its truths in matters of segregation. Proof is contained in the Bible that God will look down with disapproval on the mixing of the races and that inter-marriage is a direct sin against God. That all our people express themselves in the manner of true Christian that we believe the Negro can best worship in his own church and we can do the same thing in ours. And that we will never consent to going against God in allowing our churches to be integrated."²³

A further resolution was adopted on the integration of the public schools.

"That we take our position on the school situation and make a study of the same. That we oppose the mixing of the negro and white children in all our schools and that we believe the decision of the Supreme Court was more a decision of the type handed down in Russia than that expected in the great United States. That a study be made of the National Education Association and the text books being used in some of our schools."²⁴

This seems to be a change in the position of the church on integration since the 1868, when it invited the negro to obtain membership and remain in Christian demeanor with the church.²⁵

Since the 1957 General Conference, no official stand has been taken on integration. Some churches

²²Ibid., p. 35. ²³Ibid., p. 48. ²⁴Ibid., p. 48.

²⁵Wilton R. Fowler, Jr., "A History of the Congregational Methodist Church" (unpublished Master's thesis, Stephen F. Austin State College, 1957), p. 65.

have had negro visitors and they were received as visitors. Westminster College, however, has agreed to the open door policy, required by the Federal government of income tax exempt status.²⁶

The 'Revised Standard Version' of the Bible was, also, an issue before this conference. At that time the church took a stand opposing the Revised Standard Version, which has remained the position of the church to the present.

"That we take our stand on the Bible and the truths contained therein and openly oppose the 'Revised Standard Version' of the Bible and that we provide our people with literature explaining the difference in the Bibles. That we write letters of protest to the American Bible Society for their use of the new Bible in their²⁷ work of distribution of the Bible world wide."

The church felt that the Revised Standard Version was a liberal interpretation of scripture and that for textual purposes the King James Version should be used. Other versions are to be read and studied, but not used as text.²⁸

²⁶Based on personal correspondence between Rev. Austin Watson, President of the General Conference, and the writer.

²⁷General Conference Minutes of the Congregational Methodist Church, 1957, p. 48.

²⁸Based on personal correspondence between, Dr. Marvin Sheffield, President of General Conference from 1941-1960, and the writer.

This conference was rather lengthy due to the large amount of business. One of the sessions ran until four A. M. before the business was finished. However, the conference ended on a high note and it was felt the church had made tremendous progress.

The Laurel Mississippi Conference

The General Conference of 1961 met in the Civic Center Auditorium in Laurel, Mississippi on October 10-14. Officers elected were Rev. W. E. Bruce, president; Rev. W. T. Stevens, vice-president; Rev. Austin Watson, secretary; and Rev. A. E. O'Connor, executive secretary. This was a rather progressive conference, but two major issues of concern were before the church, the Elton Lewis situation and the continuous harassment of the group that split off in 1941.

In 1958 Rev. Elton Lewis proposed a program that the Board of Church Extension and the Board of Evangelism cooperate in establishing one hundred new churches over a period of ten years. The plan was to sell \$40,000 worth of bonds to finance revival meetings and to establish new churches. However, Rev. Elton Lewis was in considerable personal financial trouble, and used the money wrongly.

In an investigation of his activities, the executive committee of the joint boards, found that approximately \$17,000 worth of bonds were sold or placed in

security for a personal note. No account was made for approximately \$23,000 worth of bonds. Rev. Lewis claimed they had been destroyed, but it was found that they were still in his possession and that he was trying to sell them at a 25% discount.

These and other criminal activities of Rev. Lewis were turned over to the legal authorities. A suit was charged against Rev. Lewis in an attempt to recover the misappropriated funds.²⁹

Another issue of discussion was the continued harassment from the group which split off in 1941. Since that time they had given the church quite a bit of agitation and a few lawsuits concerning local church properties. They brought a suit against the General Board of Publication with respect to the copyright of the Discipline. A similar charge was filed against the General Conference, in which they tried to keep the General Conference from being organized.³⁰

This became a major issue of concern in the General conference and the General Conference supported the action taken in filling a cross suit.³¹

²⁹ Rev. W.E. Bruce and other, "Statement of Charges Against Rev. Elton Lewis, Chairman of the Joint Board of Church Extension and Evangelism," Messenger, KLVIII, 28 (1960), 6-7.

³⁰ "Special Notice," Messenger, XLIX, 36 (1960), 4.

³¹ General Conference Minutes of the Congregational Methodist Church, 1961, p.39.

The Gallman Mississippi Conference

The General Conference of 1965 was held at Camp Wesley Pines near Gallman, Mississippi, on October 13-15. Newly elected officers were Rev. Austin Watson, president; Rev. David Coker, vice-president; Rev. Ned Chipley, secretary; and Dr. Marvin Sheffield, executive secretary.

In this conference the fiscal conference year was changed from October first to July first. This was done to make it easier for pastors with school children to change churches.

The creation of the Department of Home Missions was considered a major achievement of this conference. This was done by merging the Board of Church Extension and the Board of Evangelism into one department. This new department was primarily concerned with directing a church wide evangelistic program and the establishing of new churches.³²

The Fort Worth Texas Conference

The 1969 General Conference was held at the Texas Wesleyan College in Fort Worth, Texas, August 4-8. The officers elected were Rev. Austin Watson, president; Dr.

³²Ned Chipley, "Highlights of the General Conference," Messenger, LIII, 42 (1965), 1.

W. R. Fowler, vice-president; Rev. Ned Chipley, secretary; and Dr. Marvin Sheffield, executive secretary. This was one of the smoothest General Conferences the church had experienced in many years. No controversial issues, as there were in the previous three conferences, faced the church in this conference; but the church did make some major decisions.

The establishing of the Administrative Committee was considered a major achievement of the conference. This took the place of the Advisory Committee, set up in the 1957 conference, in an attempt to bring a more unifying and cooperative working relation among the General Departments. The duty of the committee is:

It shall be the duty and responsibility of this committee to promote the spiritual, numerical, and financial growth of the General Conference of the Congregational Methodist Church subject to such instructions given by the General Conference. It shall coordinate, correlate, and unify the plans and activities of the several constituent departments so that a unified policy may be established by and in all the activities of the Congregational Methodist church.³³

Another important move was the creating of the Department of Christian Education. This was done by uniting the Department of Sunday Schools and the Department of C. M. Y. S. under the new department.

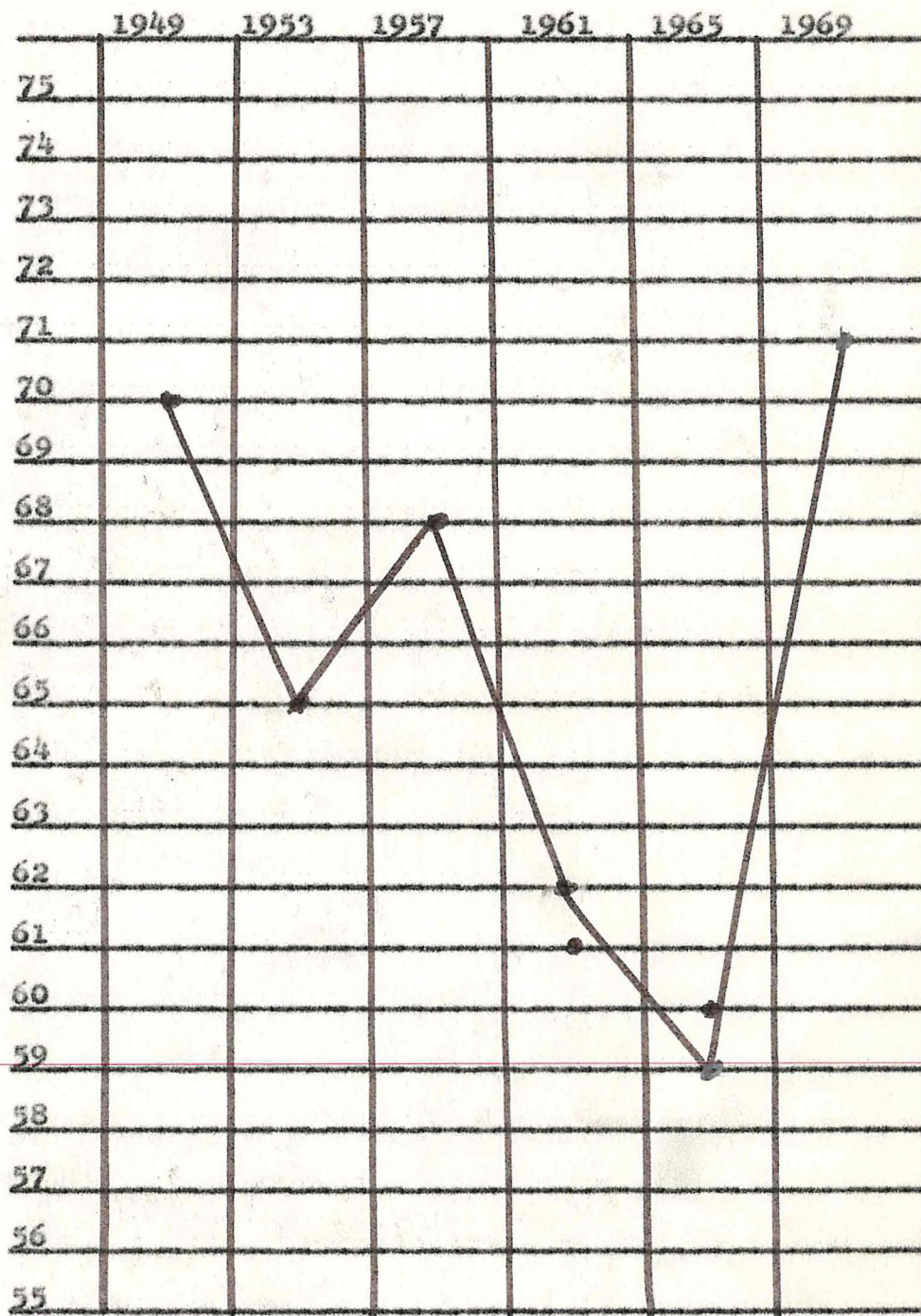
The climax of the highlights of the General Con-

³³General Conference Minutes of the Congregational Methodist Church, 1969, p. 44.

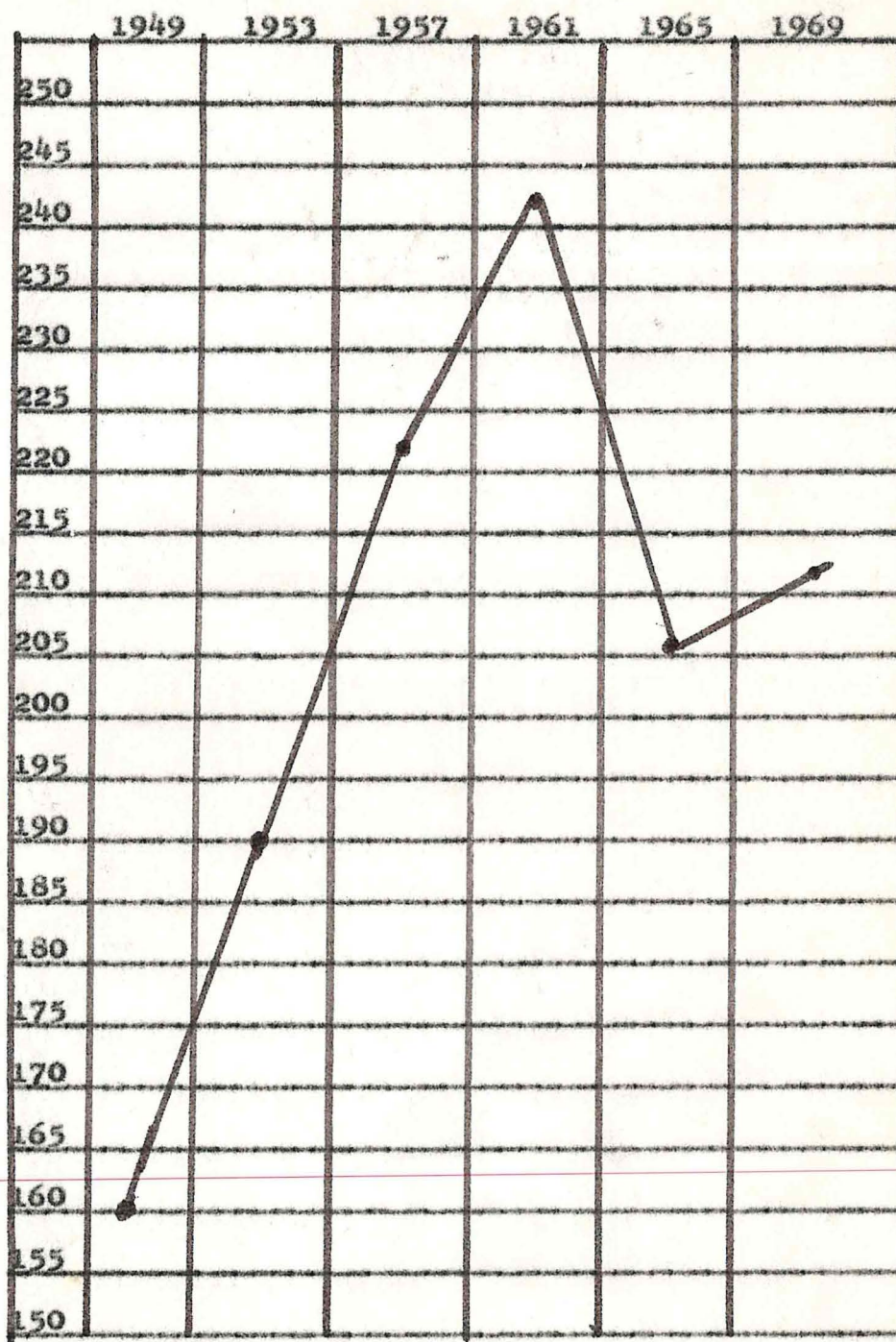
ference was the presentation of the plans for moving Westminister College to Florence, Mississippi. The conference reaffirmed the relocation of the headquarters with the new campus. This meant that all the General Department offices were relocated in one central location. This was a great step in unity for the church.³⁴

³⁴"Congregational Methodism on the Move," Messenger, LXII, 33 (1969), 7.

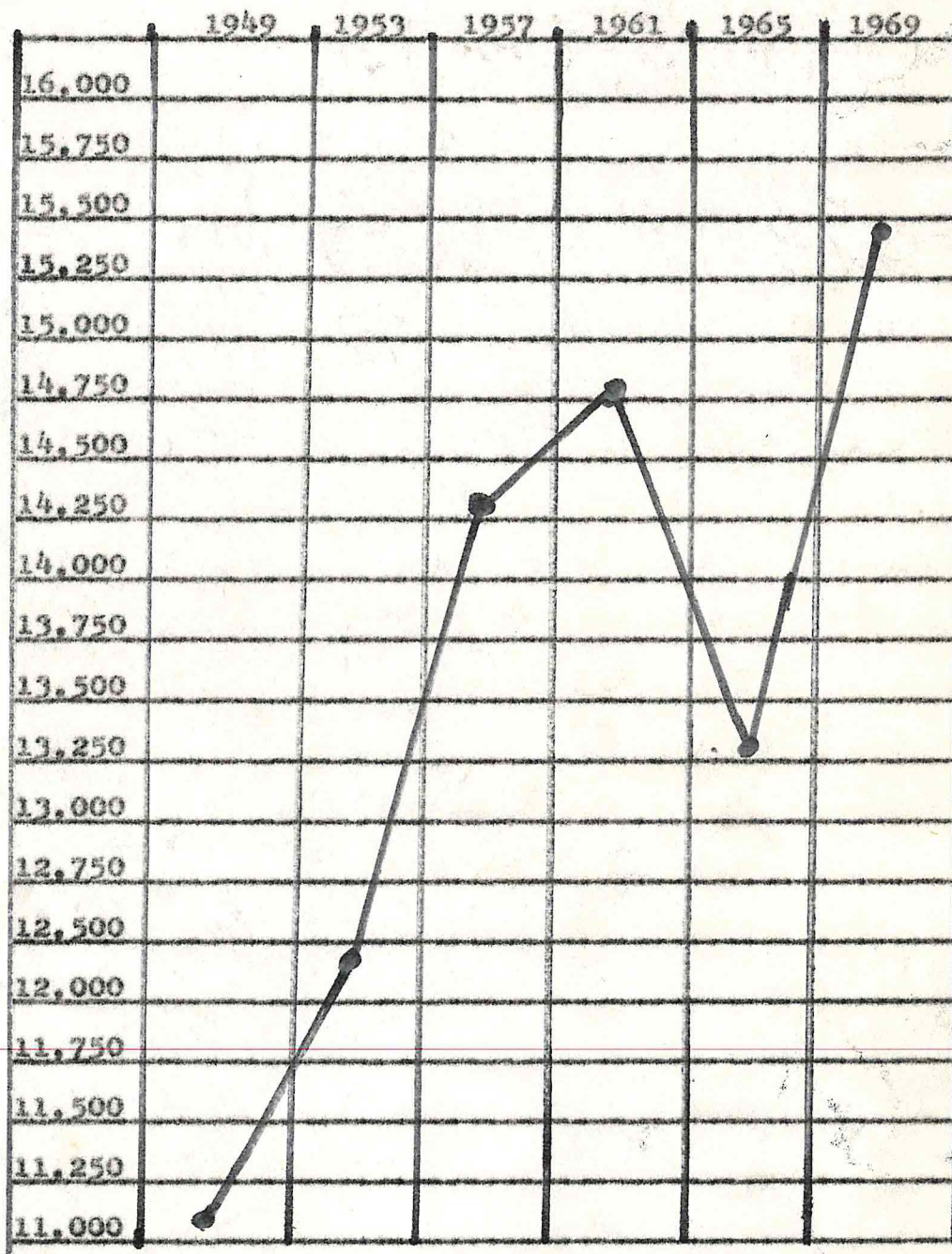
The following chart shows the average membership of the local congregation in the Congregational Methodist Church.



Number of Churches Represented in General Conference



The following chart shows the growth and decline of the membership of the Congregational Methodist Church from 1949 to 1969



Chapter 4

A HISTORY OF THE PUBLICATIONS DEPARTMENT

Chapter 4

A HISTORY OF THE PUBLICATIONS DEPARTMENT

The Department of Publications is a General department of the Congregational Methodist Church for the purpose of presenting the doctrine of the church through the printed word. This is done by a weekly church periodical called the Messenger, the printing of Sunday School materials, youth materials and many other services to the church.³⁵

Getting the gospel to the people in printed form has been a prime concern of the church from its beginning. This is seen in the action taken by the first regular session of the General Conference concerning this need.

"Whereas the committee on periodicals has been informed that a party has made an informal proposition to give our church access on a cheap plan to the column of a paper already established as a medium of communication. Resolved, that a committee be appointed to intertain the proposition and negotiate for the use of a press, and if successful to institute measures to execute whatever plans they may adopt. Resolved that in the event of failure our people ought to subscribe for some

³⁵Based on personal correspondence between Billy Tabb, managing editor of the Messenger Press, and writer.

religious periodical which teaches our doctrine."³⁶

This interest in printing the gospel resulted in establishing a church organ by the second regular General Conference. It was called the Congregational Methodist edited by Rev. Eppes Tucker, a very prominent leader of the church in its beginning. This was the first official organ of the church and acted as a great unifying element for the church.

This periodical was discontinued in 1888 because of a schism in the church when many of the churches withdrew from the Congregational Methodist Church. The results of the schism was a great loss of interest and spirit in the church, so a resolution was presented to the Georgia State Conference to sell the printing press and equipment which the church had at that time.³⁷

In the 1890's another church journal was being printed by Rev. L. B. Wilson called the Welcome Tidings.

³⁶ Minutes of the General Conference of the Congregational Methodist Church The First through the Twentieth Session. (Tehuacana, Texas: Westminster College Print shop, 1960) p.3.

³⁷ **This volume was produced in the Westminster College Print Shop by students of Westminster College and Bible Institute, under the direction of W. R. Fowler, Jr.

³⁷ Wilton R. Fowler, Jr., "History of the Congregational Methodist Church" (unpublished Master's thesis, Stephen F. Austin State College, 1957), p. 75.

This publication was a great unifying element in the church after the schism and was renamed the Congregational Methodist in the general conference of 1893.³⁸

In 1899 Rev. Rolf Hunt became editor of the official church organ and changed its name to the Watchman. Rev. Hunt first lived at Miller, Georgia, but soon moved to Atlanta where he started a publishing house along with a Bible school. The Bible school and publishing house operated in this capacity until 1909 when it suffered financial failure. This resulted in a collapse of the school and publishing house and school was charged with improper handling of funds.³⁹

By the next General Conference another church journal had been established called the Messenger. This paper, operated as the official church journal reporting news of the church and other articles promoting the church doctrine, never reached proportions of the church.

In the General Conference of 1937 Rev. Marvin Sheffield was elected as editor of the church paper. He described the condition of the paper as, "a four-page monthly Messenger, printed on the poorest grade of new-stock and full of mistakes."⁴⁰ This was the extent of the General Conference program at that time. Rev.

³⁸Ibid., p. 79. ³⁹Ibid., p. 83.

⁴⁰Based on personal correspondence between Dr. Marvin Sheffield, President of General Conference from 1941 to 1960, and writer.

Sheffield lived in Mt. Pleasant, Texas and drove to Ft. Worth, 160 miles, to have the Messenger printed. The paper was soon made an eight-page publication printed on a good grade of white paper, as well as the improving of the appearance and content of the paper. Before many months the first Sunday School quarterlies were written and printed.

Plans were soon made for a church printing shop. Rev. Sheffield purchased a little card press, one font of type, learned to set type himself, and with that meager equipment he operated the church's official publishing house in a three room parsonage.

Later Rev. Sheffield reated a store building, bought a foot-pedal press, and paid a man \$1.00 a day to help him operate the publishing house. Together they set type, by hand, and printed an eight page Messenger twice a month.

Then a larger press was bought, later one with an automatic feed, then a linotype machine and the church began to print Adult, Intermediate and Junior Sunday School quarterlies. Then the church took over some property in Dallas, Texas by assuming an \$8,000 note and paying Dr. & Mrs. J. T. Upchurch \$50.00 a month as long as either of them lived.⁴¹

The publishing work was able to make great progress

⁴¹Ibid.

while in this location. The equipment was constantly improved making it possible for the church literature to be improved as well as offering other services to the church. A bookstore was started in conjunction with the publishing house giving another service to the church.

The publishing house operated in the background of the denomination, but offering a very part of the total church program for many years. It was the oldest of the general departments and was pushed in the background while the other departments were born and developed.

In 1970 Mr. Billy Tabb became manager of the publishing work and brought new interest to the work. Mr. Tabb had previously worked with a news paper in Jackson, Mississippi and brought experience to the work which was much needed. Mr. Tabb realizing the needs and opportunities of the work, said he was called to the work as ministers are called by God.⁴²

The achievements in the work has certainly proven the blessing of God under his leadership. Upon assuming his duties he began a drive to get the Messenger in every home in the Congregational Methodist Church. This promotion received an immediate response, resulting in the subscription to the church paper nearly

⁴²Minutes of the General Conference Administrative Committee of the Congregational Methodist Church, January 5-6, 1972, report in the appendix given by the managing editor of the Messenger Press.

doubling in the first two years of his leadership. Other evidence of the blessings of God on the leadership of Mr. Tabb is seen in the increase of staff in the department from four to nine in two years, and a continually upgrading of the content and appearance of the church organ.

In 1972 the Board of Publications developed a Writers Foundation. This is an attempt to employ writers to write books on the teachings of the church. The first employee of the development was Dr. Marvin Sheffield, a long time editor of the Messenger.⁴³

The most significant event in the history of the publishing work of the church is in its move to Florence, Mississippi in September of 1972. This makes it more centrally located to the majority of the churches and will be able to offer a greater service to them.⁴⁴

⁴³A. E. O'Conner, "Marvin Sheffield Day," Messenger, LX, 36 (1972), p. 1.

⁴⁴Based on personal correspondence between Billy Tabb, managing editor of the Messenger Press, and writer.

Chapter 5

A HISTORY OF
WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

Chapter 5

HISTORY OF

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

Westminster College is the main educational arm of the Congregational Methodist Church. It was created for the purpose of providing for her constituency educational opportunities within the framework of a Bible College guided by a Christ-centered educational philosophy.⁴⁵

Westminster College was established in 1944, and was the third attempt of the church to establish an institution for higher training. The first attempt was under the leadership of Rev. Rolf Hunt around 1900. He started a Bible school, the Atlanta Bible School, in Atlanta, Georgia, along with the publishing work of the church.

The combination of the Bible School and the publishing house helped to expand the church. The unity and interest that they gave to the church brought it to a peak in 1909 until 1969.

⁴⁵Based on personal correspondence between F. Douglas Feazell, President of Westminster College, and the writer.

At the General Conference of 1909, fourteen annual conferences were represented with a total of fifteen thousand members and about three hundred and twenty-five churches.

Before the next General Conference a financial disruption came to the publishing house and Bible School resulting in their collapse. Rev. Hunt, the school president, called for emergency help from the churches to save the school from its indebtedness. However, the debts were not met on time and the school was closed.

The Bible School in Atlanta did not reach proportions of the church, but it was an effort in which the church took great pride.⁴⁶

Around the 1930's some more property was purchased in Anniston, Alabama, for the purpose of establishing a Bible School. This project failed because of a controversy which arose in the church over sanctification, as a second work of grace. Rev. W. C. Swope, the chairman of the board of education, got the property after the 1941 General Conference when the church split.⁴⁷

The church soon gained another zeal for an insti-

⁴⁶Wilton R. Fowler, Jr., "History of the Congregational Methodist Church" (unpublished Master's thesis, Stephen F. Austin State College, 1957), p. 81.

⁴⁷Based on personal correspondence between Dr. Marvin Sheffield, President of General Conference from 1941 to 1960, and the writer.

tute of training. In 1944 the Congregational Methodist Bible School was opened in conjunction with the printing department in Dallas, Texas. Rev. Otto Jennings, Dr. J. T. Upchurch and Rev. Marvin Sheffield composed the management committee. Rev. W. E. Bruce came as superintendent later, that same year, and served in that capacity for nine years.

The first classes were offered at night with only nine students, all girls and women. In the limited facilities, along with the publishing house, the student body reached more than forty students.

In 1953 the school moved to Tehuacana, Texas, where a campus was purchased from the Methodist church. Tehuacana had been a college town for several institutions for well over a hundred years. In 1852 Tehuacana Academy was set up as a nondenominational school. The academy operated about ten years. In 1869 Trinity University was established in Tehuacana by the Presbyterian Church. In 1866 construction of stone was started on the main building and was completed in 1872. The stones were hand cut from a hillside nearby.

In 1902 Trinity University moved to Waxahachie, Texas. Then the Methodist Protestant bought the school and operated it as a college. When the Northern Methodists, The Southern Methodists and the Protestant Methodists united in 1939 the united group operated it as a

junior college. It was closed in 1949.⁴⁸

The campus remained vacant until 1953 when the Congregational Methodist bought it. The Bible School in Dallas was then moved to Tehuacana and its name was changed to Westminster College and Bible Institute.

Soon after settling at Tehuacana the program began to expand. Within the frame of reference Westminster College and Bible Institute, two types of programs were offered.

1. A Bachelor of Religion degree program which consisted of a comprehensive, four-year study of Bible and Bible related studies such as Biblical Literature, Theology, Missions, Pastoral Studies, Philosophy, Christian Education as well as general education courses such as English, History, Math, speech, language, etc.

2. An Associate degree program which included the Associate of Arts and the Associate of Science, both of which are two year programs.

In 1969 the program was altered to fit into the framework of a Bible College. From 1969 to 1972 only one degree was offered, namely a Bachelors of Arts with a major in Bible and a minor in English. The name was changed in 1969 from Westminster College and Bible Institute to Westminster College.

Beginning with the fall semester of 1972 its program was changed to include the following:

⁴⁸John Banta, "Small College Looks Big," Messenger, XLVIII, 14 (1960), p. 1.

1. A Bachelor of Arts degree program which is a four-year program with majors in Christian Education, Christian Missions, New Testament, Old Testament, and Pastoral Studies. Each of these programs must include study of Greek or Hebrew.
2. A Bachelor of Science degree program which is a four-year study with majors in Christian Education, Christian Missions, and Pastoral Studies.
3. A Bachelor of Theology degree program which is a four-year comprehensive study of the Bible and Bible-related studies.
4. An Associate degree program which is a two year program and includes both the Associate of Arts and Associate of Science programs.
5. A Diploma program which includes both a two year and a three year program of studies, including general education along with Bible and Bible-related courses.

Westminster College operated at Tehuacana, Texas under the leadership of Rev. Harold Pitts (the first president), Rev. John Ragsdale, Rev. W. E. Bruce, Rev. Elmo McGuire and the present president F. Douglas Feazell. These men gave capable leadership to the school which made it possible for the school to produce many leaders, pastors and Christian workers, throughout the church.

The Most climatic event in the history of Westminster College was its relocation in Florence, Miss-

⁴⁹Based on personal correspondence between F. Douglas Feazell, President of Westminster College, and the writer.

issippi, in the fall of 1972. This came out of a growing desire to have the college more centrally located in the denomination geographically, the need for better facilities and the need to locate the college near a larger city so students could more readily find employment. In 1971 a campaign was launched which provided necessary funds for the move. The move was made in August 1972, from the sixteen-acre campus in Tehuacana, Texas, with poor facilities to the new forty-acre campus with beautiful modern facilities.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Ibid.

Ratio of Westminster College Alumni
In Leadership positions throughout the Church

	General Conference Officials	Mission- aries	Annual Conference Chairmen	Ministers
Percentage Westminster Alumni	60%	79%	60%	26%
Total Number	5	24	10	374
Number Alumni	3	19	6	99

Out of the ministerial students who have received training at Westminster College, 88% of them are actively involved in the work of the Congregational Methodist Church.

Distribution of Westminster College Alumni

In the Leadership of the Five General Departments

Name of Board

Publications Board

Foreign Missions Board

Westminster Board of Directors

Home Missions Board

Christian Education Board

Percentage Westminster College Alumni

50%

42%

22%

71%

66%

Total Number On Board

8

12

9

7

9

Westminster Alumni On Board

4

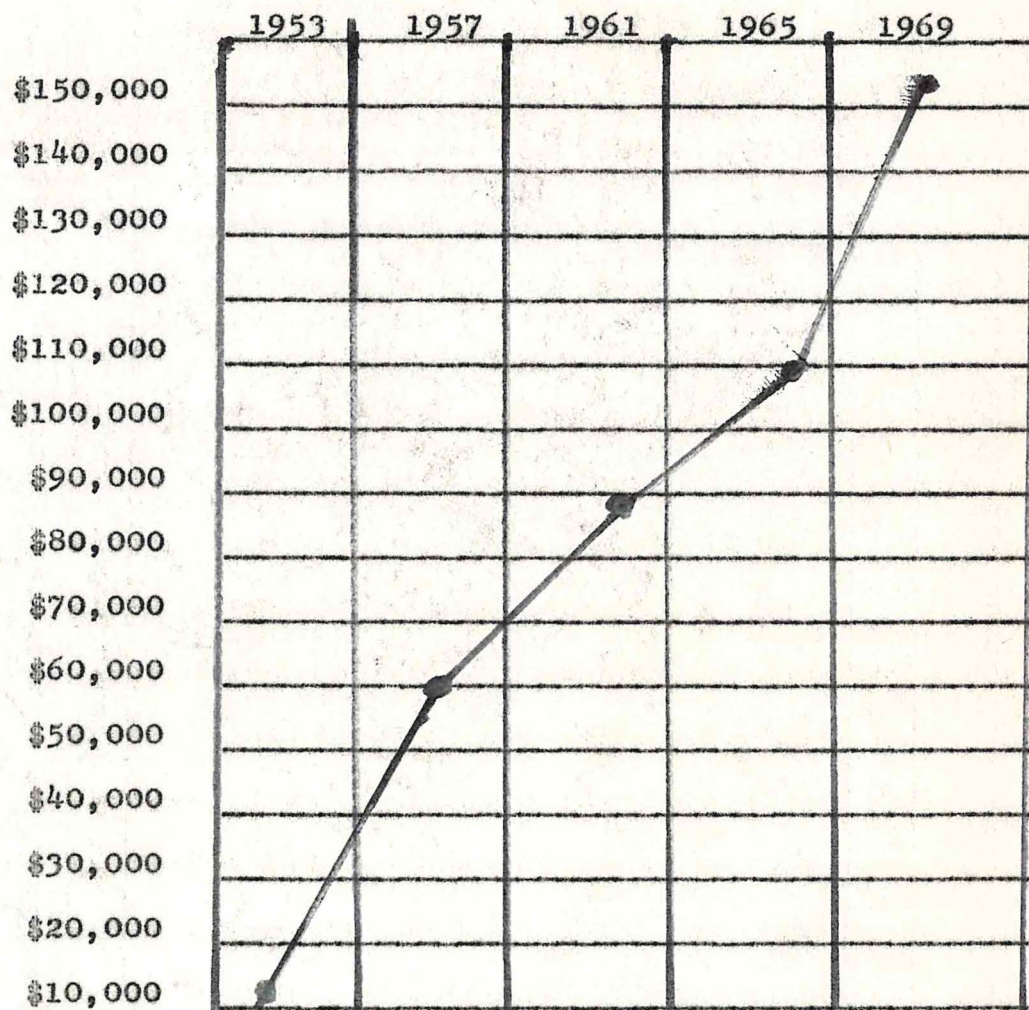
5

2

5

6

Local Church support of Westminster College



This chart shows the givings of the local churches as it was reported in the General Conference Minutes. Individual and private firm donations are in addition to these figures.

Picture of new campus development started in 1972
in Florence, Mississippi.

Chapter 6
A HISTORY OF THE
FOREIGN MISSIONS DEPARTMENT

Chapter 6

HISTORY OF THE FOREIGN MISSIONS DEPARTMENT

The Department of Foreign Missions is the arm through which the Congregational Methodist Church extends its message across the world. The spirit and purpose of the department is clearly seen in scripture. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher" (Romans 10:13-14).

The Congregational Methodist Church has always been conscious of the need for missions, but were rather slow to develop an active mission program. The following policy was adopted on foreign missions in the first General Conference: "We are not in a condition to establish and maintain a foreign"⁵¹

This remained the policy of the church on foreign missions until about 1909. In the 1909 General Confer-

⁵¹ Minutes of the General Conference of the Congregational Methodist Church The First Through the Twentieth Sessions (Tehuacana, Texas: Westminster College Print Shop, 1960) p. 3.

ence the first recorded offering of \$356 was listed for foreign missions. From this time there began to be a change in the church toward foreign missions.

Sometime between 1900 and 1916, Misses Mattie Long and Florence Williams started a work in India. The Work was largely evangelistic and educational along with an orphanage. The work was owned and managed by them, but they did receive support from the Congregational Methodist church. One of the ladies married an Indian and died in India. The other returned to the states.⁵²

Mission giving up to 1945 was rather spasmodic. There was no organized mission program in the church, so the church supported missionaries from various groups as they appeared in the local churches.

New life for foreign missions came in 1945. Prior to this several of the annual conferences were supporting missionaries, so there was a need for a General program to coordinate their efforts. This was done in the 1945 General Conference by establishing the Foreign Missions Board. The purpose of this board was, (1) to decide on qualifications of missionaries under their supervision, (2) to formulate plans of methods by which their support is established through the united efforts

⁵²Walter E. Bruce, "Progress Report For Foreign Missions," Messenger, LIX, 46 (1971), p. 4.

of the church, and (3) to keep a record of the money received and disbursed and make a report to each General Conference.⁵³

The first missionary, under this board, Miss Lucy Lee, was sent to Mexico in 1947. This was the first organized effort of the church in missions and resulted in the missions giving tripling in the next four years.

The Foreign Missions Board became an auxiliary member of World Gospel Mission in 1947. Later it became a cooperating denomination. Now it has two members on the board of World Gospel Mission and one on the executive committee. Most missionaries desiring to serve in fields where the Congregational Methodist Church has no established work, go out under World Gospel Mission.⁵⁴

Some of the missionaries who have gone out under World Gospel Mission have held rather influential positions. Four of them have been field superintendents as well as other managerial positions.

Rev. John Ragsdale pioneered the World Gospel Mission's work among the American Indians in Arizona. During his stay there, he founded and directed a school

⁵³Minutes of the General Conference of the Congregational Methodist Church The First Through the Twentieth Sessions (Tehuacana, Texas: Westminster College Print Shop, 1960) p. 127.

⁵⁴Bruce, loc. cit.

among the Indians as well as acting as field superintendent.⁵⁵

Leroy Little has done pioneer printing work in Africa. He founded and developed the Grace Memorial Press in Burundi, for fifteen years. One outstanding work Leroy has done in this capacity, is the printing of a paper called the Burakeye, which means 'the morning light is breaking'. This is the only evangelical paper in the country of Burundi which has a population over three million. He has printed the Bible as well as offering many other services to the mission. While managing the Grace Memorial Press, Leroy has, also served as field superintendent.

Leroy Little is now working with Radio Cordac in Burundi as a radio technician. This work has the possibilities of reaching one hundred million souls daily with the gospel in their native language.

Burnie MaLain, another Congregational Methodist missionary, has continued the printing work in Africa when Leroy Little left. While managing the press, Burnie McLanin has printed over five hundred thousand tracks for 'New Life for All', an evangelistic effort for the entire country, in addition to his regular

⁵⁵Personal interview with Rev. Lester Moore, Western Director of World Gospel Missions, December 22, 1972.

printing duties.

Billy Harold has had a very influential position in the work in Honduras. He has been very active in evangelism, director of the Bible school and served for many years as superintendent of the field.

Gene Toomey has worked in Mexico under World Gospel Mission. He has worked largely in evangelism and served as field superintendent.

Other Congregational Methodist Missionaries have not served in such leadership positions, but have served well in their respective positions.⁵⁶

Most of the work directed by the Foreign Mission Board has been in Mexico. This work has been largely in evangelism and teaching. The mission station is on the border of Texas and Mexico, but much of the work is done among the ranches in the interior of Mexico.

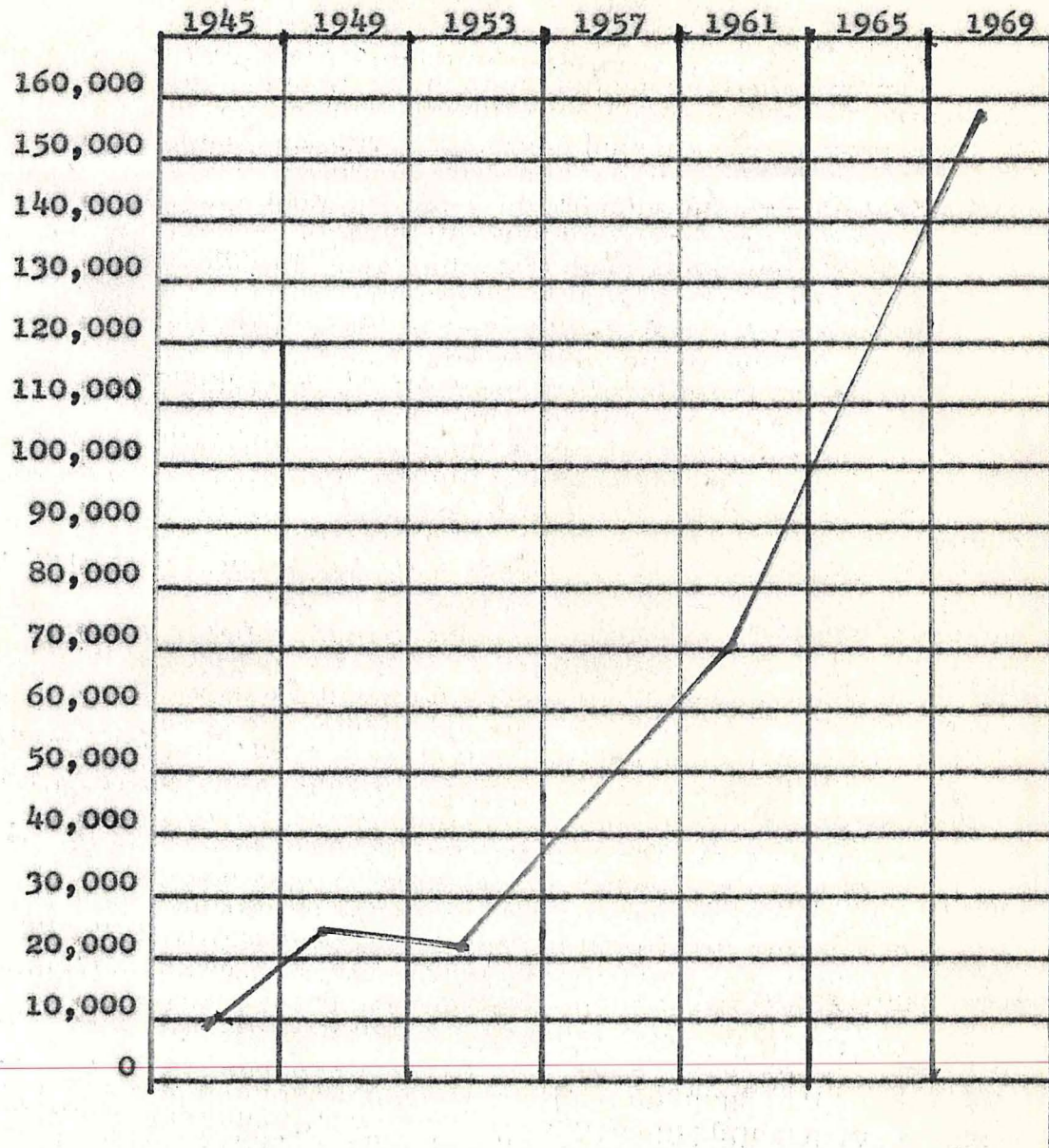
⁵⁶Personal interview with Dr. Eldon R. Fuhrman, vice-president of the executive committee of World Gospel Missions, January 10, 1973.

List of Congregational Methodist Missionaries

Name	Place of Service
Miss Lucy Lee	Mexico
Mr. and Mrs John Ragsdale	American Indian (Arizona)
Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Little	Burundi (Africa)
Miss Viola Miles	Kenya (Africa)
Mr. and Mrs. Barnet	Mexico
Miss Barbara Dukes	Mexico
Mr. and Mrs. William Weeks	Dallas (American Indian)
Mr. and Mrs. Ray Deleon	Dallas (Mexican American)
Mr. and Mrs. Burnie McLanin	Burundi (Africa)
Mr. and Mrs. Dale Owens	Mexico
Mr. and Mrs. Leo Vermillion	American Indian (Arizona)
Mr and Mrs. Gene Toomey	Mexico
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Shrum	Mexico
Miss Florance Tingle	Mexico
Mr. and Mrs. Brady Duren	Mexico
Mr. and Mrs. Mike Gary	Mexico
Miss Shirly Beverly	Mexico
Mr. and Mrs. Donnie Pope	Mexico
Mr. and Mrs. Billy Harold	Honduras
*Miss Margret Vance	Spain

*means not under the Foreign Board, but a member of the
Congregational Methodist Church.

Missions Givings of the Local Church



This chart shows the missions givings of the local churches as it is combined in the General Conference Minutes every four years.

Chapter 7

A HISTORY OF THE
HOME MISSIONS DEPARTMENT

Chapter 7

A HISTORY OF THE HOME MISSIONS DEPARTMENT

The Department of Home Missions is the arm of church extension and evangelism for the Congregational Methodist Church. It has given to the church a new zeal and direction in evangelism and a workable program for establishing new churches and overseeing their growth.

The Department of Home Missions was created in the 1965 General Conference, by combining the Board of Church extension and the Board of Evangelism. The Board of Church Extension had been in existence about fifteen years before that conference. Its main business had consisted of loaning small amounts of money, about \$500.00, to churches to build a Sunday School room and other such small projects. It had not been effective in developing a program for establishing new churches and overseeing them. The Board of Evangelism created in the 1949 General Conference had, also been ineffective in promoting a plan for evangelism in the church.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Based on personal correspondence between Rev. Ned Chipley, director of Department of Home Missions, and the writer.

In 1961 a young man with a new spirit and enthusiasm, by the name of Rev. Ned Chipley, was elected as director of The Board of Evangelism. In 1962 Rev. Ned Chipley directed the first soul winning conference ever held in the Congregational Methodist Church. It was a four day conference in Lufkin, Texas, where principles of soul winning were explained and demonstrated. From this time forward, there began to be a perceptible change in the church toward evangelism. The Board of Evangelism began to plan and promote evangelism over the entire denomination.

This new interest in evangelism brought a need for further study in the area of evangelism. So a study conference was called by a joint effort of the Board of Church Extension and the Board of Evangelism at Westminster College in May of 1964. This conference was challenged by a very inspiring address given by Rev. Elmo McGuire, the chairman of the Board of Evangelism. In his address he said:

"Over the years we have become over protective on our personal beliefs and careless about the winning of the lost and the growth of the church. By the side of the road, we have not put our church into the mainstream of American life.... The time has come when our people must see the great need and utilize our golden opportunity in the field of home missions. We must do what is necessary to launch a strong home mission program throughout our denomination.... We must grow or die."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Elmo McGuire, "The Necessity of Home Missions," Messenger, LIV, 14 (1966), 1.

The results of this inspiration was the development of ten major objectives which set the tone for the work of the department of Home Missions. These objectives are:

1. To inspire and challenge the church to greater efforts to win more people to Christ and the church through intercessory prayer, personal evangelism, and revival campaigns;
2. To provide instruction and training in principles and methods of evangelism;
3. To devise and promote practical programs of evangelism;
4. To encourage and supervise the establishing of new churches;
5. To provide advice and assistance in the planning of church building programs;
6. To assist congregations in securing funds for church building programs;
7. To devise means by which funds may be secured and used for home mission purposes;
8. To promote the program of home missions both internally and externally through extensive campaigns of publicity;
9. To investigate and to negotiate with other congregations or groups who desire to unite with the Congregational Methodist Church;
10. To coordinate the evangelistic efforts of the various agencies of the church.⁵⁹

These objectives, plans and recommendations were presented to the 1965 General Conference, which resulted in

⁵⁹ "Report to the General Conference of the Department Of Home Missions of the Congregational Methodist Church" (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Wesleyan College, 1969), p.1.

in the creation of the Home Missions Department. This decision of combining the Board of Church Extension and the Board of Evangelism into this new department was considered one of the major achievements of that General Conference.⁶⁰

The board of directors of this newly created department soon met in Laurel, Mississippi, to organize the work of the department. Rev. Ned Chipley was elected as director and the department began a service to the church which had been urgently needed for many years.

Most of the work done by the Home Missions Department from 1965 to 1969, was focused on developing a workable plan for organizing new missions and overseeing their growth. And under the competent leadership of Rev. Ned Chipley the department began to see results.

To raise money to finance these new missions the department conducted several CALL-A-THON campaigns. The response of the local churches in these campaigns was overwhelming, and shows how the denomination was behind the department. In these campaigns the local church was to take a special offering for the department of Home Missions to use in establishing new churches. When the offering was taken the church was to report to the Home Mission office by phone the amount received. Almost, always the amount received far exceeded the goal set by the Home Missions department.

The first major project of this department was to

organize and conduct a denomination wide emphasis on stewardship. This was repeated annually with about 500% greater participation each year.⁶¹

In May of 1967 the Home Missions Department sponsored a seminar on church growth. In this seminar the vision for church growth of the department of Home Missions was explained to pastors across the entire denomination. The spirit from this seminar was catching. Rev. B. F. Simpson, pastor of an Independent Methodist, in Jackson, Mississippi felt lead to unite with the Congregational Methodist Church as a result of this seminar. This church, the Asbury Church, later elected Rev. David Watson as pastor and has now developed into one of the denomination's largest churches.

Up to July 1968 the director of the Home Missions Department had worked on a part-time basis while pastoring a local church. The Lord spoke to Rev. Ned Chipley in August of 1967 showing him he should resign from the pastorate to give himself full-time to the work of the department. This he did, making it possible for the Department to put its first full-time director on the field as of July 1968.⁶²

⁶¹Ned Chipley, "The Home Missions Report," Messenger, LV, 26 (1967), 6.

⁶²Based on personal correspondence between Rev. Chipley, director of Department of Home Missions, and the writer.

The full-time director made it possible for the work of the department to be brought more personally to the local churches. This was done by tours of the director across the entire General Conference. During one of these tours the director made a contact with the Churches of Christ in Christian Union, a denomination of the same faith and size of the Congregational Methodist Church, concerning a possible merge between the two churches. The director, Rev. Ned Chipley, attended their General Council in 1968 and their General Superintendant, Rev. W. L. Cozad, was a guest speaker at the Congregational Methodist Church General Conference of 1969.⁶³

Since 1969 there has been little talk of a merge, but the two denominations have continued to exchange fellowship and evangelists.

In May of 1969 the Department of Home Missions began a greater thrust on personal evangelism. This was started by a seminar in Laurel, Mississippi, with Rev. George Delamarter, a Free Methodist minister, with the Christian Witness Crusade, as the main speaker. In this seminar Rev. Delamarter explained principles of personal evangelism and presented his plan of "Salvation by Appointment."⁶⁴ This seminar was received by the denom-

⁶³Ned Chipley, "Special Home Missions Report," Messenger, LVI, 36 (1968), 1.

⁶⁴Ned Chipley, "News 'N Views," Messenger, LXII, 15 (1969), 5.

ination with great favor and many pastors rejoiced at the insights received in personal evangelism.

The Home Missions department in 1969 was, also, responsible for the spirit of enthusiasm and cooperation between the different departments in the 1969 General Conference, which made it possible for the relocation of the headquarters to Florence, Mississippi. During that year the director, Rev. Ned Chipley, had made a tour of the entire General Conference presenting a slide program showing the interrelation and emphasizing the cooperation between the general departments. This personal contact, information and emphasis on cooperation found an immediate response among the churches which led to a General Conference with a unity between the General Departments which the church had not experienced in many years.⁶⁵

The 1969 General Conference showed that the church was behind the department and the work it was doing. The program and procedures for establishing and developing new missions were well under way. So the department, in 1970, began to turn its emphasis toward evangelism in a greater way. This was first done by developing an evangelistic spirit. Several soul winning conferences were conducted along with conferences on leadership principles.

⁶⁵Based on personal correspondence between Rev. Ned Chipley, director of the Department of Home Missions, and the writer.

The department cooperated with the Department of Christian Education in sponcering a special youth seminar in July 1970. This seminar was spoken of very highly by many; however, it received some criticism because of the theological position of some of the speakers.

The plans for evangelism were developed more in 1970. The Department of Home Missions decided to cooperate in a nation-wide evangelistic thrust called Key 73. This being an evangelistic effort of about seventy-five different denominations for the purpose of reaching every person in North America with the gospel message. Department leaders attended a planning meeting of this evangelistic thrust and began developing a program to fit it into the Congregational Methodist Church.⁶⁶

The start of the program was the conducting of a General Conference Ministerial Convention and Conference on Evangelism. The convention was held at the Mt. Vernon Church at Laurel, Mississippi, which just completed a beautiful new building program. The convention had a dual purpose; to show the co-operation between the different departments; as well as mobilize forces, and organize efforts for evangelism.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ "Nationwide Evangelistic Thrust Planned," Messenger, LIX, 28 (1971), 1.

⁶⁷ "Convention Plans, Topics Told," Messenger, LIX, 38 (1971), 1.

This convention brought delegates from all areas of the General Conference. The enthusiasm for evangelism was the greatest the denomination had ever experienced. A special time of prayer and fasting was called a turning point of the convention and hailed as the most significant development in years for the denomination. One pastor called it a terrific 'milestone' for him and his church.⁶⁸

However, during this convention considerable concern was expressed about the church's identification with some of the more liberal denominations in Key 73. The results of this opposition was a withdrawal from the program of Key 73. It was understood that the co-operation with Key 73 did not involve doctrinal promise, but it was generally felt that affiliation with it would be widely misunderstood, and thus, do more harm than good.⁶⁹

This short affiliation with Key 73 did give the Congregational Methodist Church the inspiration and challenge for a church-wide evangelistic emphasis for two years. Later the plans were developed for this church-wide evangelistic effort which became known as MISSION CONTACT: Covering Our Neighborhood Talking About Christ Today.

⁶⁸"Evangelism Meeting Called 'Milestone'," Messenger, LIX, 41 (1971), 1.

⁶⁹Ned Chipley, "Home Missions Department Gives Statement on New Plans," Messenger, LIX, 43 (1971), 3.

This program got under way with a month long prayer chain during the month of January of 1972. The different churches were asked to sign up for a twenty-four hour period and report back to the Home Missions Department as to the date. It was organized so it would be an unbroken prayer chain for an entire month. The people were to first pray for their own spiritual needs and secondly for lost persons in the community. This prayer chain gave much enthusiasm and interest to the evangelistic effort.⁷⁰

The promotion of Mission Contact was done by another tour of the director of Home Missions of the entire General Conference. During this tour he explained the program, gave out materials and suggested ways of training. However, the program soon found opposition. There was bitter opposition to the source of training being recommended. That being Lay Institute For Evangelism conducted by the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ International. The opposition came to a head following Explo 72, because of those from liberal groups involved in the program.

A special meeting of the Administration Committee was called to discuss the matter in September of 1972.

⁷⁰ "Prayer Cells With a Purpose," Department of Home Missions News Letter, December, 1971, p. 2.

The following recommendation was made to the Department of Home Missions.

"Whereas, on January 5, 1972, the program of the Department of Home Missions was presented to the Administrative Committee and one part of the program being a recommendation to send our people to Lay Institutes For Evangelism conducted by Campus Crusade For Christ,

Not withstanding the good that Campus Crusade may be doing and the fact that much could be profited by the various mechanics of the winning of souls, due to the recent developments in Campus Crusade in the program of Explo '72 and the divisiveness it has caused among our people,

We wish to strongly suggest that the Home Missions Department no longer promote Campus Crusade, either its meeting or materials."⁷¹

This took the heart out of the training for Mission Contact and led to the resignation of the director, Rev. Ned Chipley, effective October 28, 1972.⁷²

The influence of the eleven years of service by Rev. Ned Chipley in the Department of Home Missions is far reaching to the denomination. Under his leadership the Home Missions Department was responsible for establishing churches in Concord, North Carolina; Midland, North Carolina; Griffin, Georgia; Greenwood, Delaware; Dowelltown, Tennessee; Eulass, Texas; and Longview, Texas. New Missions were established in Augusta, Georgia and

⁷¹"Administrative Committee Turns Thumbs Down on Evangelistic Training," The Heartbeat of Home Missions, I, 10 (1972), 1.

⁷²"Home Missions Director Resigns, Effective October 28," The Heartbeat of Home Missions, I, 10 (1972), 4.

Liberty, Tennessee. Two nice size congregations voted to join the Congregational Methodist Church, the Asbury in Jackson, Mississippi and the Pond Creek Church in Alamo, Tennessee. Also, a total of fifteen ministers united with the church as a result of the contacts of the Department of Home Missions Department.⁷³

Shortly after the resigning of Rev. Ned Chipley as director, the department was moved to the new headquarters building in Florence, Mississippi.

⁷³Based on personal correspondence between Rev. Ned Chipley, director of Department of Home Missions, and the writer.

Chapter 8

HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

The Department of Christian Education is a general department of the Congregational Methodist Church for the purpose of promoting Christian Education in all areas of the denomination. This is done by developing materials to lead people into maturity in Christ, by promoting the same and by providing training for the use of these materials.

The importance of this department is seen in the scope of its responsibility, which covers the Sunday School, the youth work, adult training, leadership training, education in the home, weekday Bible classes, church camping, boy's and girl's clubs, children's church and private schools.⁷⁴

The Department of Christian Education is the youngest of all the general departments. It was organized in the 1969 General Conference as a result of three factors. Firstly, prior to the 1961 General Conference there

⁷⁴Based on personal correspondence between Rev. Darrel Mayo, Christian Education Director of the Congregational Methodist Church, and the writer.

was a general Sunday School committee, but was limited in its activities because of its organization. In the 1961 General Conference the Committee was changed to a Sunday School Board. The work of this board was largely in the area of improving Sunday School literature and the promoting of training for Sunday School teachers. However, the board soon began thinking about enlarging its services to meet the growing needs. There were needs for adult training, education in the home, weekday Bible classes, church camping, boy's and girl's clubs, Children's church, church school (Nurserys, Kindergartens, elementary and high schools). All of these just did not seem to fit under the Sunday School Board, so they began to study how all of these areas could be developed into one program.

Secondly, the Advisory Committee felt the need of bringing the C. M. Y. S. (Congregational Methodist Youth Society) under the jurisdiction of the General Conference, at that time a separate organization and transacted its business separately.

Thirdly, the C. M. Y. S. General Conference desired to become a part of the General Conference.

These three factors came to light in the 1969 General Conference. A joint committee of the Sunday School Board and committee from the General C. M. Y. S. met to formulate a joint resolution to the General Conference. The General Conference then passed the resolution in-

corporating the General C. M. Y. S. and the Sunday School Board under the new department called the Christian Education Department.⁷⁵

The first year of operation for this new department was largely in the area of improving youth and Sunday School curriculum, for the church. The Sunday School curriculum was improved by adding new writers and providing training for them.

The youth curriculum was completely changed. The board started promoting 'Success With Youth Material' as the church's youth curriculum. The start of this promotion was at a special youth seminar called 'Teen Dynamics Seminar'. This was a joint seminar of the Department of Home Missions and the Department of Christian Education for the following purposes: (1) to focus attention of the church upon the youth; (2) to lead youth to a deeper spiritual experience and challenge them to Christian service; (3) to provide training in effective youth work; (4) to provide instruction in the Success With Youth materials as they relate to the youth program of the church. The seminar received different evaluation, some critical and some complimentary, but

⁷⁵Based on personal correspondence between Rev. Darrel Mayo, Christian Education Director of the Congregational Methodist Church, and the writer.

it has resulted in a much improved youth program for the church.⁷⁶

Much of the work of the Christian Education Department since the seminar has been in planning for the future and providing training sessions in Christian Education.

⁷⁶Minutes of the General Conference Administrative Committee of the Congregational Methodist Church, January 7-8, 1971, Department of Christian Education report, p. 15.

Chapter 9

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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SUMMARY

The Congregational Methodist church, a church whose doctrine is Methodist and whose government is republican, has made progress during the period studied. It has spread its influence and message across that portion of the United States known as the 'deep south'. Although the growth is not as much as would be desired, there has been a perceptible rate of growth in several areas of the church.

From 1957 to 1969 the church has had a membership growth of 1,216 members. There has been a loss of six churches, but there has been a gain of three in the average membership of the local church.

Another area of progress for the church has been in the unity of the church as a whole. This was first done by establishing the Advisory Committee in 1957. This was an attempt to provide a unit to advise and correlate the work of the different general departments between the regular General Conferences, which meets once every four years. This was further developed in 1969 by establishing the Administrative Committee, which was an attempt to bring a greater unity between the

general departments. Another step in unity for the church was the moving of the church's headquarters and College to Florence, Mississippi. Before this move, all the general department offices were located in different locations several hundred miles apart. This move brought them all to one location in the geographical center of the church. This will greatly aid the general departments to cooperate in their efforts to expand the influence and the message of the church.

During the period studied the church has added to its general program two new departments, the Department of Home Missions and the Department of Christian Education. These two new departments were a great step in progress for the church. They were developed out of some existing inactive boards, thus, putting the church on a road of progress in these two areas.

Much progress has been made in the field of printing for the church. The church's Official Journal, the Messenger, has been constantly upgraded in appearance and quality. The move of the printing department to Florence, Mississippi has aided the department in extending its ministry to the church.

Westminster College has undergone academic changes from a junior college and Bible institute to a four year Bible College. It has, also moved to Florence, Mississippi, where it is much more accessible to the denomination as a whole.

In the area of Foreign Missions the givings of the church has more than tripled since 1957. Progress in Foreign Missions is further seen in additions to the missionary staff. In 1957 there were five missionaries under appointment by the board, now it has twenty-five under its appointment.

The Congregational Methodist Church is a progressive denomination. It is gradually spreading its message of redemption for fallen man throughout the world.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the research completed, the conclusions that have been drawn from this investigation are:

Weaknesses of the Church

1. The church lacks higher training for its leadership. Approximately twenty-two per cent of the church's ministers have attended Westminster College, the church's official school for higher training. Some have attended other colleges and universities, but the rate of trained ministers is low.

2. The church is weak in that it lacks clearly defined and communicable objectives. The only objects are those written in the minds of its leaders. There are no written objectives for the denomination as a whole.

3. The organization of some of the districts is a weakness. Some of the district conferences consist of

as few as three churches. This limited number of churches in a district makes it impossible for it to support adequate leadership.

4. The church lacks an agent of unity. The only agent of unity, to most of the rural churches, is the church paper, the Messenger. This paper has a subscription of about 2,600 in a denomination whose membership is 15,490. The church lacks a personal agent of unity. There are no bishops or superintendents.

Strengths of the Denomination

1. The church is strong in its doctrinal position. It believes that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and therein is contained the plan of salvation for all men.

2. The government of the church is a strength. The church places a high importance on the local church. The power of the denomination is widely dispersed beginning at the local church level and progressing upward through the various conferences. Thus, an action of the general level must be a general moving of the Holy Spirit rather than the idea of one individual or a small group in authority.

3. The church is strong in its emphasis on evangelism. Most of its missionaries are engaged in evangelism. There are several active lay evangelism groups in the local churches, as well as an emphasis on evangelism.

gelism in all the general departments.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. A study should be done as to why some local churches have grown while others have not.
2. A study should be done as to the needs of the local church in Christian Education.
3. A study should be done as to why the denomination as a whole has largely remained a rural area church.
4. A study should be done as to why the church has remained largely in that part of the United States known as the 'deep south' and never ventured to the north.

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APPENDIX

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF THE CONGREGATIONAL
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