



## Heritage and Roots

The Evangelical Church of North America was born June 4, 1968, in Portland, Oregon, when forty-six congregations and about eighty ministers met in an organizing session. Within two weeks a group of about twenty churches and thirty Ministers from Montana and North Dakota became a part of the new church. These congregations and Ministers had been a part of The Evangelical United Brethren Church but had declined to enter the newly formed United Methodist Church. The former Holiness Methodist Church became a part of The Evangelical Church of North America in 1969, bringing its local churches, ministry and membership, along with a flourishing mission field in Bolivia, South America. The Wesleyan Covenant Church joined in 1977, along with its missionary work in Mexico and Brownsville, Texas, and its work among the Navajo Indians in New Mexico.

The origin of The Evangelical Church can be traced back to the Wesleyan movement in England under John Wesley, the founder of The Methodist Church. It is distinctly a North American Church, having had its beginnings in the great spiritual awakening which visited the early colonists in the new world after the middle of the eighteenth century. Like the early Methodists they preached the pure Word of God, and declared that men can be saved from sin, through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, and that this experience must be followed by a life of dedication and holiness.

## The United Brethren In Christ Church

In the eighteenth century it pleased God to raise up men like William Otterbein and Martin Boehm who preached the Gospel of the crucified Christ in its purity. Armed with the spirit and grace of God these men worked among the Germans in America and called sinners unto repentance. Their labors were blessed of God and they organized many places of worship and led many precious souls to Christ. The Lord called others who were willing to devote themselves to His service. The work grew rapidly and in 1789 the first Conference was held in York County, Pennsylvania. At the Conference held in Frederick County, Maryland, on September 25, 1800, they officially united themselves into a Society which bore the name, The United Brethren in Christ, and elected William Otterbein and Martin Boehm as Superintendents or Bishops. The need for a Book of Discipline was deeply felt and in 1815, at the General Conference held in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, a Book of Discipline containing the doctrine and rules of the Church was presented. These brethren believed that God is a God of order, and that where there is no order and no church discipline, the spirit of love and charity will be lost.

# **The Evangelical Association and the Evangelical Church**

Upon the instruction and advice of that godly minister of the Gospel, Jacob Albright, a number of persons in the State of Pennsylvania, who had become deeply convinced of their sinful state through his ministrations, and who earnestly groaned to be delivered from sin, united in the year 1800, and agreed to pray with and for each other, that they might be saved from sin and flee from the wrath to come. In order to accomplish this work properly they agreed mutually to spend each Sunday in prayer and in the exercise of godliness; also to meet each Wednesday evening for prayer; diligently endeavoring to avoid everything evil and sinful, and to do all manner of good as God should give them strength and ability. The number of those disposed to attend these meetings soon increased and grew daily. The first steps of organization were taken in 1800 when Jacob Albright organized three classes, appointing a class leader for each class. The first Council was held on November 3, 1803. The first Conference was held in 1807 in Kleinfeltersville, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania. In 1809 a Book of Discipline was adopted and printed. In 1816, at the first General Conference, the name, The Evangelical Association was adopted. In this new church conversion was the central theme, a word which signified a gracious, regenerating experience with God, through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. During the nineteenth century the operations of this church enlarged in evangelism, education and publications. In the latter part of the century, differences arose in The Evangelical Association which culminated in a division in 1891. A considerable number of Ministers and laymen withdrew and took the name The United Evangelical Church, which held its first Conference in 1894. Both churches endeavored to carry on the work of the Lord and grew in numbers and missionary enterprise. By 1910 the growing conviction that the two churches should be re-united found articulate expression, and in 1922 The Evangelical Association and the United Evangelical Church were united under the name The Evangelical Church.

## **The Evangelical United Brethren Church**

Negotiations, beginning in 1933, were consummated in 1946, at Johnstown, Pennsylvania, when The United Brethren in Christ and The Evangelical Church united and became The Evangelical United Brethren Church. This church sought to serve its Lord in the proclamation that salvation is available to any upon the free, personal acceptance of God's offer, through Jesus Christ. Conversion, while personal, is not a private matter and finds its consummation in holy living and in serving as an instrument of God for the redemption of the whole world.

## **The United Methodist Church**

Over the years there were many contacts between The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church and its antecedents, revealing their common heritage. These contacts led to the merger of these two denominations in 1968, forming The United Methodist Church. However, due to a growing difference in theological emphasis and social philosophy, there were those from the former Evangelical United Brethren Church for whom it was deemed best to decline from entering into the newly formed United Methodist Church.