

ratified to more accurately reflect the beliefs of the Fellowship. Adopting a rule-by-elder structure of church government led to the elimination of the President Elder and District Superintendent offices. Because the Conference chose to graciously grandfather in preachers who held to the "old doctrines," the Conference did not split apart but worked together to the glory of God. In time, most pastors understood and held to the doctrines of grace pertaining to salvation that are now required of pastors seeking ordination in the BFC as part of our Articles of Faith.

Changing Culture

By the late 1990s, the BFC expanded its outlook to reach communities outside its traditional Pennsylvania German heritage. The BFC, spearheaded by Church Extension Ministries, developed Biblical Principles for Living to highlight cross-cultural godly living traits such as humility, love, and justice while explaining its position on a number of biblical and contemporary issues. In 2008, its first Spanish-speaking congregation in Reading, PA was received into Conference as well as its first international church in Merida, Mexico. The focus on reaching its neighbors remains today. Several of its churches hold services in a variety of languages including Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic.

Working Together

Over the course of its history, the BFC engaged in a variety of ministries:

- The Gospel Herald Society were street evangelists who held tent meetings and planted churches. It was renamed the Home Mission Society and is now known as Church Extension Ministries. Church Extension plants new churches in places that are largely without a Bible-believing church and a gospel presence.

- The Board of Missions has supported foreign missions around the globe in partnership with a wide variety of sending boards.

- Berean Bible School, which eventually became Pinebrook Junior College, opened in 1950 to prepare pastors, missionaries, and Christian workers. It closed in 1992 as four-year colleges and seminaries became the preferred preparation for ministry.

- A home for the aged and orphans opened in 1906 in Center Valley, PA before moving to Nazareth in 1960. Fellowship Community in Whitehall, PA, which opened in 1988, operates today as a separate organization.

- Mizpah Grove in Allentown, PA was one of our summer camp meeting locations as church families enjoyed spending time together and hearing speakers. In 1968 the fellowship sold Mizpah Grove and purchased Pinebrook Bible Conference in Stroudsburg, PA. In 2018, Pinebrook was ceded to Spruce Lake Retreat but the BFC still utilizes the property for a number of annual activities.

- In 1955, a property in Zionsville, PA was purchased to operate a children's camp; Victory Valley Camp remains today as a thriving BFC ministry.

From a loose association of Mennonite revivalists influenced by the holiness movement to a Wesleyan denomination to a Reformed fellowship holding to the doctrines of grace, the Bible Fellowship Church stands firm today as new churches continue to be built and new congregations are planted.

For further reading see BFCHistory.org.



1011 Brookside Rd. Ste. 145
PO Box 3555, Allentown PA 18106
BFC.org



**Bible
Fellowship
Church**

"An Expanding Fellowship of Churches
United to Make Disciples of Jesus Christ"

“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Matthew 16:18

The Bible Fellowship Church (BFC) has a rich history which demonstrates the faithfulness of God in keeping His promises to build His church.

Early Years

On Friday, September 24, 1858, seven Mennonite revivalists, under pressure from their local bishops to give up their style of evangelism, huddled at a farmhouse in Lehigh County, PA. With the next high council meeting two weeks away, they considered this question: would they acquiesce to restrictions upon the freedom of expression they enjoyed in their revival and prayer meetings? No, they would not, and so they established the Evangelical Mennonite Society. Bishop William N. Shelly and preachers William Gehman and Jonas Musselman provided leadership for this dynamic group, and as other young men joined them, the organization developed. In 1866 they published their *Glaubenslehre (Doctrine)*, which contained a statement of faith and church order along with a constitution for the mission society.

The same revival winds blowing through Southeastern PA influenced other Mennonites, and many joined together with the Evangelical Mennonite Society to form the Evangelical United Mennonites. What is now the BFC was called the Pennsylvania Conference; William Gehman became



its first Presiding

Elder in 1880. At that time there were five active congregations, all in Eastern PA. In 1883, the Evangelical Mennonite Society merged with the Brethren in Christ, a small group in Ohio, and the Mennonite Brethren in Christ was formed.

Growth was rapid. Neither World War I nor the Great Depression dampened evangelistic fervor. By



1920 the Conference had doubled in size over what it

in 1900. Over the next 20 years, it doubled again through evangelistic tent meetings and the efforts of the Gospel Worker Society and the Gospel Herald Society, who preached door to door and distributed gospel literature in numerous communities. The Sunday School movement also attracted many children and adults. Weekly meetings were held in homes, but continued growth soon made larger meeting places necessary.

A New Name

Changes in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ followed the end of World War II. Disagreements



with the other Mennonite Brethren in

Christ Conferences about doctrine and practice were magnified by personality differences, and in 1952, the Pennsylvania Conference voted to separate from the others. Official reasons cited for the separation included differences over the doctrine of holiness, foreign mission programs, educational plans, financial autonomy, church



government, and objection to a projected merger with The Missionary Church Association. In 1959, the Conference adopted

a new name — the **Bible Fellowship Church** (BFC). The influence of the Bible School movement led our forebears to no longer hold to several traditional Mennonite doctrines, especially those regarding salvation. New Articles of Faith were