

History of Curtis Road Church of God, Champaign, IL

(This church was originally known as the Urbana Church of God. Organized 1925)

[Evelyn Scogin Robertson, from this church, served as the State Sunday school and Y.P.E. Director for Illinois from 1934 to 1936. As far as we have been able to determine Mrs. Robertson was the first lady to serve in such an official position in the Church of God.]

In 1925 a group of people who were hungry for more of God was worshipping with a Free Pentecost group on East Illinois Street in Urbana. The Free Pentecost group decided to go into the Foursquare Gospel organization. Several from the group didn't want to join the Foursquare church because they felt that too much attention and praise was given to Aimee Semple McPherson. This fragmented group began meeting in homes. The leaders of this group were Mr. and Mrs. M. J. Curl, George and Ises Ivey, and Arnold and Elva Scogin. The Curls and the Iveys belonged to the Church of God in Bonpus Creek, Illinois, and had moved to Champaign. It was their hope to win this group to the Church of God.

The group continued to grow and decided to start having Sunday School. The Scogins had just moved into a new home at the end of the East High Street intersection with North Lynne Street in Urbana. Since they had plenty of room, it was decided that their home was the best location for Sunday school. The bedrooms were used for classrooms. Before long the home was too small for the crowds, so a hall was rented in downtown Urbana on Race Street over a dairy. The hall was used on Saturday nights for lodge meetings, so the church folks had to get there bright and early on Sunday mornings to clean out the beer cans and cigarette/cigar butts in time for Sunday school. One constituent recalls that although she was only about ten years old at the time, she can still remember exactly how that room smelled.

Many signs and wonders were performed by the Lord, which made every effort well worthwhile. Not one person among that fellowship would have even taken an aspirin tablet. They fully trusted the Lord for every part of their lives and He totally met their needs. One person indicated she could write a book about the miracles that were performed by the laity of this church.

The next summer, a tent was erected in a little park on East Green Street in Urbana. Stanley Joplin preached and Mabel Day sang. (Mabel Day later became Mrs. Houston Morehead). It has been reported that Mabel "made the piano talk" and that her favorite solo was the song "My, Didn't It Rain." While the meetings were still held in their homes, the people agreed to pay their tithes and offerings so they could bring in special speakers and later build a church. They also started using Church of God literature.

The following summer, a large tent was placed on East University Avenue across the street and a block east of Carte Hospital. There is a service station on that lot now. Large crowds attended and the Lord blessed with signs following the believers. Many new converts were attending and the congregation knew they were going to have to make a decision as to church affiliation.

The following winter, the Scogins sold their new home and moved into a rented house on South Vine Street while they were remodeling a house on Philo Road. Ancil Newton came and held several meetings in this home, preaching Church of God doctrine. Arnold Scogin had been a deacon in the First Baptist Church of Urbana and was very unhappy because his wife had been Spirit-filled and disgraced him by speaking in other tongues. He vowed he'd never join another church since he'd been raised a Methodist and had already given that up and joined the Baptist church for his wife. One night after a wonderful service in the Scogins' home, Brother Newton felt led to give opportunity for membership in the Church of God. Thinking the whole

congregation would join, Brother Scogin went forward, but nobody else joined that night, so he was the only member of the new church. This made him the only charter member and Sister Scogin really teased him about it. The next time opportunity was given, Sister Scogin and four or five others joined, and Brother and Sister Curl and Brother and Sister Ivey transferred their membership to the new church. During that time, Ancil Newton came as the church's first pastor. The Newtons had four children at the time and lived in a little three-room house on East California Street in Urbana. Brother and Sister Risinger lived across the street from the Newtons; and Ruby Fern (Loy) was about four years old. The Risingers were active members of the church at this time.

The women of the church met once a week in Sister Thompson's home to make bazaar items, and later on they made donuts and delivered them door-to-door. Finally there was enough money on hand to pay a down payment on an old house at the corner of Illinois and Maple Streets in Urbana. It was a two-story house, and the partitions were removed from the first floor so it could be used for church services. The pastor and his family moved into the second floor. By this time a new baby had been born to the Newton family. Brother and Sister Newton's children were Robert, William, Kathryn, Laura and Baby Modeana. At first laying boards across concrete blocks made the pews. In those days you didn't worry about whether you had padded pews or not. Just being able to join together to worship God and feel the presence of His spirit were most important.

There soon was enough money on hand to tear the old house down and build a new church. The men of the church had agreed to do most of the work themselves. Weeks went by and nothing had been done. One day, Sister Scogin became so impatient to see the work progress that she went to the house with a crowbar and hammer and started tearing off the shingles. Needless to say, the men took the hint; and soon the old house was torn down and construction began on the new church building. During the years many wonderful times were experienced, as well as hardships; but the Lord never failed the church. The mortgage was burned August 13, 1944. E. O. Kerce was State Overseer, and Carl S. Carder was pastor at this time.

In 1953 under the pastorate of Kenneth Harrawood, construction began on a new church at the corner of Park and Busey Streets in Urbana. Possession of the new church building took place on June 1, 1954. In 1977 the building at Park and Busey Streets was sold to Carle Hospital, and property was purchased for a new facility on Curtis Road in Champaign.

A brand new parsonage was constructed next to the church in 1989 during the pastorate of Wesley Baker. Pastor Forest Hagood inspired the church in the area of missions, and during his pastorate the church parking lots were upgraded from rock to asphalt.

Under the pastorate of Pastor Neil P. Smith, the church building received many updates, including new carpeting in the sanctuary and hallways, new countertops in the church kitchen, and metal siding and roofing on the gymnasium.

Beginning in the early 2000's, the area surrounding the church property was being developed very quickly. A new subdivision had sprung up around the west and north sides of the property and would soon take over the East Side as well. Plans for improving Curtis Road from asphalt to a four-lane concrete street were in the works. Soon our "country" church would be in the city.

Chris and Teresa Smithey came to Curtis Road COG in December 2002. Under their leadership several improvements have taken place. We have enlarged and updated the stage in the sanctuary, replaced the carpet throughout the church, moved and enlarged the Children's Church room, and enlarged the Youth room. We've also been able to celebrate the fact that we've paid off the church mortgage. Even with the changes in the church building and new

people coming to worship with us, the one thing that has remained constant is the love of the people for the Lord and for each other.

The treasurers (clerks) have been: C. A. Scogin (1933-37), William Risinger (1937-43), Mrs. Elmer Fannin (1943), Fern & William Risinger (1944), Fern Risinger (1945), Robert Blackwood (1947), Lyman Robertson (1948-78), George Gravely (1979), Dale Nibling (1980-85), Mabel Nibling (1985-2004), and Vickie Diorio (2004-present).

Former pastors of the Champaign church are as follows: Ancil Newton (1928), Joy Bell (1929), Stanley Joplin (1930-35), Hughes Morehead (1935-37), Carl Richards (1937-38), Carl Carder (January 1938), Theron Forrester (November 1938-41), Ermil Summers (1941-43), M. G. Swart (1943-44), W. J. (Bill) Brown (1944-46), Robert Blackwood (1946-48), Andrew Long (1948-51), Harry Henderson (1951-52), N. A. Jordan (1952-53), Kenneth Harrawood (1953-56), Garland Mills (September 1956-58), Madison Sindle (1958-61), Lyle Jackson (1961-66), Grady Hodges (1966-68), George E. Underwood (1968-69), Floyd Aldrich (1969-70), Lyle Jackson (1970-77), Gordon Harrawood (1977-78), Thomas Edwards (1978-78), James Tiffin (September 1982-84), Raeford L. Black (October 1984-88), Wesley Baker (December 1988-91), Forest L. Hagood (May 1991-95), and Neil Smith (1995-2002). Chris and Teresa assumed leadership of this congregation December 2002 and are the present pastors.