

The forefathers of the Henderson MB Church were the Anabaptists (meaning “over again baptism”). These Christians of the Reformation in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe required baptismal candidates be able to make their own confessions of faith and thus rejected baptism of infants. Because of their views on baptism and other issues, Anabaptists were heavily persecuted during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and into the 17<sup>th</sup> Century by both Protestants and Roman Catholics. Most Anabaptists adhered to a literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, which precluded taking oaths, participating in military actions, and participating in civil government. The persecution drove many Anabaptists to leave their European countries (like Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands).

“Mennonites” were people were associated with Menno Simons (1496-1561) of Friesland. The early teachings of the Mennonites were founded on the belief in both the mission and ministry of Jesus. Mennonites survived by fleeing to neighboring states where rulers were tolerant of their radical belief in believer’s baptism. They eventually settled down in Prussia and then moved to Russia. In 1860, because of the laxity among the Mennonites, a renewal movement in Russia resulted in the beginning of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Because of more persecution and in order to worship as they wish, Mennonite Brethren and Mennonites moved to North America.

In September 1874, 35 families arrived in Lincoln, Nebraska. They stayed for 6-7 weeks to give leaders time to locate a place in which to settle. They went by train to Sutton and continued to Henderson by foot or ox and wagon. A minister of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia came to Henderson in 1876 and started conducting meetings in Mennonite homes.

#### 1880-1887

By 1880 the congregation had grown to sufficient numbers that a separate building was needed. The first meeting house, located west of the current church cemetery, was built from sun-dried bricks. Each household made a donation of money or bricks. The \$500 structure was ready for the General Conference on October 18-19, 1880. The furnishings were all hand made. Within seven years, the membership was over 200. Each family furnished two sacks of cobs a year for heat.

#### 1887-1926

Because of inadequate space, a wood frame structure was constructed near the adobe building. Each person able to work was requested to work from three to six days. It was finished in time for the Harvest Mission Festival and the ninth General Conference in October 1887.

After a few years, Sunday School was begun in the afternoon following church services in the morning. Only one teacher was elected and the Sunday School class was the entire congregation. Children were taught the ways of the Lord and they emphasized memorization from the Bible.

1926-1946

By 1926, the second church building was inadequate because of the growing membership. A majority of the congregation chose to construct the new building in town at the present location. The second building was deconstructed and usable wood was transported to Henderson to use in the new building.

The new building was completed in time for the General Conference in 1927. Not all the members were satisfied with the building program and consequently, about 40 members withdrew and began a new congregation across from the site of the second church.

1947-1970

The church facilities have been remodeled several times, including the additions of a choir rehearsal room, pastor's study, and secretary's office. A Christian Education wing was dedicated on October 16, 1966.

1970-present day

Various activities continue to be important to ministry at Henderson MB Church. Vacation Bible School in summer and Primetime, CHAOS (Jr High), and Reach (Sr High) on Wednesday evenings during the school year all serve to help meet developing spiritual needs of the younger generations through Bible stories and studies, memorizing verses, singing, praying, crafts, and games.

Reach (formerly Mennonite Brethren Youth or MBY) was founded over 50 years ago as a way to minister to young people. It hosts fundraisers like spaghetti feeds, potato bakes, or waffle feeds as a way to cover expenses of going to the annual Central District Youth Conference and the National Youth Conference held every four years. CHAOS (Christians Having A lot Of Spirit) was formed to help the youth in junior high have a special place on Wednesday evenings to learn, grow, and play. Primetime continues to be a time for children aged three through upper elementary to learn about the Lord.

Each fall the Harvest Mission's Festival celebrates God's faithfulness and provision. The focus is on praising God and giving bountifully to His work including outreach and conference ministries. This day includes a special guest speaker and banquet meal.

The Family Center was dedicated in November 1996. It includes a large meeting room with kitchen, conference room, and two pastoral offices and a secretary office. It is used by the church and community for meals, celebrations like weddings and family gatherings, and other large events. The Christian Education wing received a facelift in Winter 1997.

Reference Materials:

Hiebert, Clarence, **The Henderson Mennonite Brethren 1878-1978**, Henderson Centennial Committee, Henderson, NE 1975.

Voth, Stanley E, "Churches and Church Activities" **Henderson Mennonites from Holland to Henderson**, Henderson, NE, Third Edition, pages 244-245.