

In Its Third Century of Ministry

Local church celebrates homecoming this Sunday, September 10th

The First Christian Church of Mt. Vernon began a third century of ministering to Rockcastle County this year. The church was established early in the 19th century, 1830 to be exact. On September 10th, the congregation will celebrate its 170th year with the theme "Celebrating the Past to Prepare for the Future." The celebration will begin at 10:00 a.m.

Through the centuries the non-denominational, independent congregation has ministered to thousands of Rockcastle County citizens and through its missions program thousands around the world. The motto of the church in this present day is, "A local church with a HEART for the world." Radio broadcasts over WRVK and the church's newsletter has been changed in recent years to reflect this value. You can hear the church's broadcast, "Heart to Heart," over 1460 AM every Sunday morning at 8:45 a.m. as it has been for nearly 30 years now. The church's newsletter, "The Heartbeat," is a monthly publication mailed to local members and people in several states.

Families that have worshipped through the years at First Christian Church include Jim Anderkin, George Bran, Logan Bryant, Clark Brown, Judge Charles Carter, Bill Coffey, E.B. Cox, Claude Cox, Robert Cox, Jack Craig, Dr. S.C. Davis (W.T. Davis, C.C. Davis), Bill Dowell, Dr. George Griffith, Earl Hammons, Joe Hansel, Dr. J.D. Henderson (Joe David), Leo Hopkins, Ed Hunt, Louis Kelley, John Lair, Bill Landrum, J. Lawrence, C.A. Lay, Estill McBee, David McCauley, J.G. MacCall, C.C. Meace, Helen Miller (served as pianist for 40 years), Terry Mullins (Grace Ruth), Shirley Riddle, William Russell Ramsay, S.M. Smock, Alfred Sparks, Robert Sparks, Jack St. Clair, Lloyd Taylor, Bige Towers, Larnn Taylor, Joe Young. Other family names include Bowman, Bradberry, Bran, Bullock, Conover, Fish, Francis, Green, Gentry, Griffin, Holt, Irvine, Langford, Lovell, McAdams, Martin, Joe O'Mara, Perciful, Poyner, Peyton, Randolph, Thompson, VanWinkle, Webb, Westwood, Wolfe. The new generation of names that worship at First

Christian include Tom Arklin, Tom Arvin, Anthony Asher, Cleets & Ronnie Brown, Shannon Bishop, Brian Bradley, Rick Bryant, Mitz Calhoun, Lisa Clontz, Jason Cogger, Dane Cox, John Guiffilio, Eddie Hammond, Brenda Lovell, Anthony Maschal, David McCauley, Jr., James Miller, James Edward Mullins, Chris Reddington, Roger Reynolds, Judith Smith, Tim Young, to name but a few.

These names represent only a few of those who have worshipped and are worshipping at the Mt. Vernon church. At its highest peak membership at First Christian Church was 450-500. Instead of measuring growth by membership and attendance a new formula for

measuring a church's influence (more accurate) has been adopted. Because any group has within its influence the following, curious, convinced and committed, the local circle of influence for the church as it begins the new millennium is around 300 people locally and thousands globally.

A complete listing of names and recognition of past Elders and Deacons will take place at the Homecoming. If you are a former member, having grown up in the church or a descendant of one of the above families you are urged to be present on September 10. Part of the program will be to pay tribute to and give thanks for those families who have built on a solid foundation have passed on from this life into life eternal and have passed on to this generation the candlestick of the light of Jesus. This is a special, one-on-one lifetime occasion as we move into the 21st Century.

The oldest living member of the church is Mrs. Cynthia Cox who turned 100 in May of this year. The member who has been a member the longest is Mrs. Leila Sparks who at 98 is recorded in Sunday School record books as early as 1909. Mrs. Leila now lives in Somerset with her daughters and will be at a Homecoming service four years ago. Other members who are at or above the 90s include Jewell Brown, Sarah Machal and Shirley Riddle.

Members who have passed on to eternal rest in recent years include Dot Craig, Henry Cox, Frances Cox, Ed Fain, George and Martha Griffith, Estill McBee, David

McCauley, Sr., Jeanne Mullins, Reba Noe, Ralph Sigmom, Bessie St. Clair. This Homecoming will serve as a memorial service for these and others as well. All families of these families are encouraged to attend. About six years ago the church established the First Light awards to honor past and present members and citizens of the county whom have truly let their light shine. Past recipients include John Cox, Wayne Stewart, Jason and Sara Cogger, Maude Randolph, Dr. Joe Henderson, Annie Farris, Myrtle Webb, Betty Lewis. This year the First Light Awards will be presented to a group, The Willing Workers.

The history of the Willing Workers spans back to the early days of the 20th Century. Early records state that the group's formed in February of 1907. A second anniversary celebration of the group records the following in the Mt. Vernon Signal. "The Willing Workers, a society of ladies of the Christian Church, who have not only socially, but financially as well, been an indispensable factor in the success of that church." What was true then has been through the years and still today.

Other recipients of First Light Awards this year will be three Elders still living, Clark Brown and Shirley Riddle are Elder Emeritus and Ed Hunt is still an active member of the

Church board

The church has been blessed with several Godly men who have served as minister. Serving in the 19th Century include J. Quinn, George W. Mills, Stephen Collier, John Will Gibson, Martin Owens, James Monroe Chesnut, Charles Kirtley, James Allen, Peter Jamey Hiatt, George McCall, Samuel Forrer (during last years of his life gave over \$500,000 to Transylvania University and College of the Bible, Lexington). In 1900-01, James Cole, Perciful McCallum, J.W. Masters (1907-09), helped establish at least 19 churches in Kentucky during his ministry. Harry Schaffer, George Tinsley, Herbert Tandy Young (1915-1921), a WWI chaplain, served the church during the depression years, the years that the church paid off the mortgage on the present building. His granddaughter, Carolyn Setzer married Robert Sparks III. Aubrey Russell, Charles McKan (1944-47), Lanis Kineman (1948-51), brother Kineman will be present for Homecoming on September 10 and is the oldest living minister to have served the church in Mt. Vernon. Howard Ray (1951-56, 1962-64), Marion Parkey (1956-58), his son Kenton has been minister at Wilde Christian Church since 1972. Ray's son, Martin, Gene Kearns, Norman Howard (1964-68), presently serves First Christian Church, Sun City, Arizona; Bradford Coffey (1969-72), also as interim in 1991-92, born in Reno, Va., graduated from Cincinnati Bible College, he helped establish numerous churches in Oklahoma and Louisiana and prior to his death served the Climax Christian Church in Rockcastle County. Ronnie Sears (presently serves First Christian Church, Warsaw, Indiana). Bro. Ernie Johnson (1974-82, 1984-86), presently serves as minister at New Castle Christian Church in New Castle, Virginia. Jerry Perry (1982-84), presently minister in Anderson County. Tom Kelly (1992-94), presently minister at Flatwoods Christian Church in Waco, Ky.

The present minister is Eddie Hammond, a Lexington boy who grew up in Rockcastle County. Bro. Eddie is a 1979 cum laude graduate of Kentucky Christian College. He has served as youth minister to River Drive Christian Church, Inc. in Ky., Big Hill Avenue Christian Church, Richmond, Ky. and Shively Christian Church, Louisville. He has held preaching ministries at Locust Grove Church of Christ, Keays, Ky. and the historic First Christian Church of Mobile, Alabama. He is presently in his second term with the church, having served previously from 1986-91 and returning to Mt. Vernon from Mobile in 1994 to present. Previous to Bro. Eddie only Bro. Fink (10 years) and Ernie Johnson (11 years) had served longer ministries. Bro. Eddie will begin his 12th year this month.

During his ministry the church has witnessed nearly 150 public decisions for Christ, 60% by immersion. Over 250 people (families and children) have been introduced to the congregation. Tithes and offerings have increased by 40% and in 1987 the congregation entered into a long range plan to improve the present building, add a fellowship hall, increase giving to ministries, add additional ministry staff, develop a purpose statement and strategy to reach the non-believers in Mt. Vernon.

As a result the following Mission Statement has been adopted. It is not a statement of belief or creed. We have no creed, but Christ, no book but the Bible. It simply serves as a filter for our ministry teams. "Our overall purpose is to bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ by obeying His command to make disciples of all nations. Specifically, our vision is to make First Christian Church an equipping center which helps individuals become Christ-like in their lives and competent in Christian service so that together we might reach and encourage the non-believers in the Mt. Vernon community, in our Rockcastle neighborhoods, in our commonwealth and nation, and in the world, to enter a love relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ." Our Core Values include: Love people and glorify God. The church should be culturally relevant while remaining doctrinally pure. Full devotion to Christ is normal for every believer. Life change happens best in small groups. Worship is a lifestyle, expressed with a private consistency and corporate vibrancy. The church is both a trauma center for wounded people and an equipping center for the saved.

Members of the congregation serve through ministry teams including building and grounds, children's, education, hospitality, men's, outreach, senior citizens, special occasions, stewardship, youth, women's and worship ministry.

Present leaders include Elders, Leo Hopkins, Ed Hunt, Clark Brown (emeritus), Shirley Riddle (emeritus) and deacons, Clark Mullins, Bill Dowell and John Cox. Three new deacons will be voted on September 24, they are Rick Bryant, Jason Cogger, and Roger Reynolds. On staff with Bro. Eddie includes Youth/Children's director Sara Cogger, sec-

retary Kristy Lovell, treasurer Brenda Lovell and custodian Bob Maschal.

Across the street the congregation has been and continues to be involved in many outreach ministries that include VBS, camp, benevolent and around the world the church gives 15% of its general fund offerings to partner with missionaries in Central America, Christine and Danilo Viji (San Pedro Sula, Honduras), Todd and Lynell Fields (Pena Blanca, Honduras), Mexico. Peggy Russell (Mexican Christian Children's Home, Australia, Philip and Sharon Eagling, Far East, C.Y. Kim (Hanoi, Vietnam), Europe, Crimian American College (Ukraine). To help train Christians to serve, the church also partners with Kentucky Christian Assembly, Camp, Louisville Bible College and Kentucky Christian College (quarterly giving plus establishment of the Beth Reed Lewis Scholarship). They have helped establish missionaries and churches in Zambia, Africa, South Africa, Kenya, East Africa, Haiti Christian Mission, K.V. Poland.

The church has sent many of its members, youth and adults, to work in Honduras on short-term mission trips. They have also partnered with other groups coming to the Appalachians to work including Southeast Christian Church, Louisville and Wekiva Presbyterian Church, Florida.

The church can trace its roots to a group of men and women who left Virginia in 1781 to move west to Kentucky. That group was known as the traveling church. In his book, The Traveling Church, G.W. Rank recounts the group entering Rockcastle County in December of 1781. This group went on to settle in Garrard County, but many returned to set up roots in this county. These were Baptists. Close behind them rose Bishop Asbury, the intrepid pioneer Methodist Circuit rider. The Presbyterians were also among the early settlers. There were none that called themselves "Christians" only - would not be for a generation, but this was the rootstock of the Christian Church and from such pioneer spirit it began.

It is well known which of the early preachers most influenced the believers in Mt. Vernon to leave their former Baptist and Presbyterian connections. Alexander Campbell and his father Thomas had left the Baptist church and started a movement

in Pennsylvania and western Virginia. Known as the Disciples of Christ, Alexander traveled through Rockcastle County as early as 1797, "Raccoon" John Smith is recorded as having preached in what is now the Broadhead area, and so probably other places in the county as well. Baron Stone had effectively broken with the Presbyterians when he and his followers signed "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbyterians" at a meeting on June 30, 1804 at Cane Ridge in Bourbon County. Perhaps some of the citizens of the county themselves had joined the thousands at the great revivals at Cane Ridge. More than likely, that change at Mt. Vernon was affected by the combined influences of all those reformers, who, though they began in separate places and developed independently, soon found that they had much in common - indeed they shared essentially the same approach to the New Testament Church as they envisioned it.

By 1830, the reform (restoration) had taken place in Mt. Vernon, for in a meeting in December 1830, the Boone Creek Baptist Association dropped Mt. Vernon, along with Mt. Zion, Nicholasville, Liberty and Friendship. This Friendship may have been the one near Level Green in Rockcastle County.

Two years later, in 1832, at a significant meeting at the Hill Street Christian Church in Lexington, those calling themselves Christian Only, led by Stone and the Disciples of Christ, led by Campbell united in a common accord, calling themselves Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Today, out of the restoration movement there are unfortunately three separate groups, the Disciples of Christ, Acappella churches of Christ and Independent churches of Christ. The Mt. Vernon congregation remains a non-denominational body in close fellowship with the Independent Christian churches/church of Christ, but is open to fellowship to any and all people who desire to follow the principles of New Testament Christians as outlined in the New Testament. Our motto is, "We're not ONLY Christians, but Christians ONLY."

Combined, the restoration churches today number 20+ thousand with a membership in the USA of between 4-5 million. Of all-evan-

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First Christian Church shortly after remodeling in 1996



First Christian Church congregation in 1997

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