

The Midwest Conference of the Evangelical Free Church of America

The Midwest Conference was born October 2, 1896, at Oakland, Nebraska, during one of Fredrick Franson's Bible Conferences. It was first given the rather auspicious name of "The Association of Ministers, Elders and Evangelists of the Free Churches of Nebraska and South Dakota." "The Association of Ministers, Elders and Evangelists of the Free Churches of Nebraska and South Dakota." A constitution was adapted and officers were elected which consisted of the following: Reverend H. Collin, Newman Grove, Nebraska - Chairman; Rev. L. M. Ekman, Holdrege, Nebraska - Vice Chairman; A. Hjermfelt, Holdrege, Nebraska - Secretary; Rev. M. W. Nelson, Holdrege, Nebraska Vice Secretary.

The first annual meeting was held the following spring, February 24-26, at the Phelps Center Church and the infant organization was given another name, "The Scandinavian Free Mission Society of Nebraska and South Dakota." Two meetings were to be held every year--one annual and one semi-annual conference.

At the annual meeting held at Holcomb in 1900, Rev. E.A. Halleen, then pastor at Holcomb, was elected Chairman. Plans were made for greater extension work. A tent was purchased and strenuous evangelistic efforts were put forth. God blessed and the following year another tent was donated to the conference. When E.A. Halleen moved out of the state, his brother, Irving Halleen, pastor at Chicago Settlement, Hamilton County, was elected Chairman at the annual meeting of 1904. The society had grown considerably, so it was thought best to incorporate. This was done June 1, 1905, at Aurora, Nebraska, under the name of "The Scandinavian Free Mission Society of Nebraska." In 1906 the Swedish Evangelical Free Church Mission Society of South Dakota formed its own society. Chairmen for this district organization for the next several years were as follows: H.M Kjenner, 1906-1910; J.C. Olsen, 1911; John Udd 1912-1913; Axel Ohlsen 1914-1917; John Udd again in 1917; A.C. Leafgren 1918-1921; H.E. Sundberg 1921-1923; E.H. Lindquist 1924-1927; W. Westland 1927; E.L. Pearson 1928; Oscar Anderson 1929-1931; H.G. Rodine 1931-1933; F.O. Dahlberg 1934.

The Kearney Church was a struggling work during those years. In 1933 Arley Bragg, pastor of the work, gave an interesting report comparing 1933 with 3 and 1/2 years before. The three and one-half years before had five active members with 6-8 enrolled in Sunday School. In 1933 there were 35 members with 65 enrolled in Sunday School. In 1937 Colorado became a part of the Midwest Conference with Rev. Arthur J.W. Larson as the Field Superintendent. This arrangement continued for five years after which time the churches of Colorado requested a withdrawal from the Midwest District to form the Rocky Mountain District.

In 1943 Rev. H.A. Faugerstrom was called to be District Superintendent. An informal reception was held for Rev. and Mrs. Faugerstrom and son, Morris, on the evening of November 15, 1943, at the Trinity Church of Holdrege. During Rev. Faugerstrom's ministry the First church of Wichita was started under the joint efforts of the Midwest District and the National Home Mission Office. Rev. Faugerstrom continued as superintendent until his death in 1955 at which time Reverend Donald W. Leff became superintendent.

Rev. Leff was superintendent from 1955 until 1965. During his superintendency, work was begun in Omaha. Also, focus was placed on Kansas with a new work was begun in Hutchinson. Wichita also became a strong work.

Following Rev. Leff's term with the District, Rev. Marvin Westland became superintendent. Following his death, his brother, Stan Westland, became

superintendent. Also during this time, Lewis Wimberley and Darrell Johnson were associate superintendents.

Charles Crabtree was the next superintendent followed by Bill Hamel and Robert Page. Charles Worley and Philip Alessi were associates. Bill Smith is the present superintendent.

The District has continued to grow in the number of new churches. Along with growth in the number of churches, there has also come an encouraging growth of many churches, especially in the larger cities.

Even in the early days of the Free Church, the Midwest District became one of the most aggressive home missions efforts. At one time it had its own publication, "The Little Herald", edited by Rev. J. C. Olson.

The Midwest District has always been known as a strong district with great support from both pastors and the laity. God has blessed down through the years with many good things having been accomplished for God's Kingdom.

Rev. Donald Leff
Centennial Archives Committee Chairman (1996)

Superintendent Bill Smith began his ministry in 1994. The district staff has increased to include: Shawn Ammons, Director of Student Ministries; Neal Brower, Director of Church Planting; Eric Douglass, Associate Ministry/worship and young leaders; and Ken Massey, Missions Coordinator. Many of these positions raise their own support as they serve within the district. Some other district leaders would include: Greg Hubbard, Director of Theology and Credentialing; Judy Brower, Director of Women's Ministry; Jo White, Children's Ministries; and Michael Bell, Hispanic Ministries Facilitator.

The Midwest District Board of Directors currently operates under a modified 'governance model'. This board functions with a task force for Staff Relations and Finances. Meetings are held four times a year with one meeting being an overnight retreat. Four major documents guide the working of this board. These documents include: Board of Directors Process Policy, Executive Limitations Policy, Ends Policy and Executive Relationship Policy.