

CHURCHES *of* CHRIST

in

MICHIGAN



By

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The Church in MICHIGAN

There are seventy-one churches of Christ in Michigan according to the best information available. These groups number 8,000 making the average membership 112. It must not be assumed that every person whose name is listed in a church directory of a faithful congregation is necessarily a Christian in all that that exalted name implies. Nor can it be assumed that there are not Christians who are not aligned with faithful churches. Only God knows the hearts of men. But the best that can be done is making a study of this kind is to use the information which is available.

When we consider that the population of our state is about six million it can be seen that both the number of Christians and the number of churches is pitifully small. If these figures are reasonably accurate scarcely more than **one person out of a thousand** is a true follower of Christ and numbered with a loyal congregation. True, there are many isolated Christians who cannot be counted and there are many more baptized people who are within easy reach of a church, who are not faithful. But 8,000 faithful Christians aligned with faithful churches is a number far too small.

Location of Michigan Churches of Christ—

Fourteen Michigan churches are located in Detroit and two more are in Highland Park which is entirely surrounded by the big city. Twelve other churches are found in Wayne County outside the Detroit City limits. Thus Wayne County has twenty-eight of the total number. Washtenaw County adds two more a few miles to the west and Oakland County with seven churches and Macomb with four just to the north of Detroit, bring the total in the Detroit area to thirty-nine congregations of Christians.

Sixty miles to the north is Genesee County where six more loyal churches are huddled in and around the City of Flint. One congregation in Lenawee County (Adrain), one in St. Clair (Port Huron),

and two churches in Jackson raise the number to forty-nine in southeastern Michigan, two-thirds of the congregations in the state. Moreover, these churches number about 90 per cent of the members of all the churches in the state. It can thus be seen that the great strength of the Lord's People lies in that section.

The other twenty-two congregations are spread out in fifteen counties. Only one of these churches has more than one hundred members and several of them are very small. However the existence of these outposts and the fact that most of them are young is very encouraging. For instance along the west coast of the state there are several young and growing churches along with the older congregations at Summit and Ludington.

A glance at the map will show that there are five churches in the tier of counties extending eastward from Mason County to Saginaw Bay. None of these groups reaches fifty members, yet **they are the only congregations north of the middle of the Lower Peninsula and there is not a single loyal church in the entire Upper Peninsula.** Moreover our study of the map will reveal large blocks of territory in about twenty-five counties in the southern half of the Lower Peninsula where there is not a church of the Lord. Truly the field of labor is great and the opportunities are unlimited.

How Old are Michigan Churches?

The number of Christians as well as the number of churches in Michigan is small. But the numbers are far greater today than they were a generation or so ago. In fact the "youthfulness" of the Lord's churches in the state is most encouraging because it shows that they are active and that the "little leaven" is beginning to "leaven the whole lump."

It should be mentioned here that some congregations have come and gone. In this list may be mentioned the Harbor Beach church which discontinued when leaders and others moved away, always a hard blow for small churches. The Cameron Avenue Church (white) merged with West Side Central and the little church at Standish ceased to exist because of dwindling numbers. The church at Speaker, four miles north and east of Yale recently closed the doors of the old building which stands as a reminder that once a very active and earnest group of Christians held high the banner of the Lord.

We are now concerned, however, with the churches which carry on the work of the Lord today. The oldest Michigan church of Christ in existence is the Plum Street Church in Detroit, now meeting at Hamilton and Tuxedo in Highland Park. It was established in 1868, eighty-two years ago. Two present day churches began in the 80's, Deckerville in the Thumb and Vinewood in Detroit. The Summit Church, eight miles south of Ludington, began in 1893 and stands today as a rural congregation which has continued to keep house for the Lord for more than half a century. These four congregations are the only ones in existence in Michigan over fifty years of age.

The next two decades saw the beginning of only six more of today's churches, Ludington, Akron, West Side Central and Fairview in Detroit, Murray Hill (now Court Street) in Flint, and Gladwin, at the Buckeye Townhall. Thus thirty years ago only nine of the present day churches in Michigan were in existence.

The twenties saw the beginning of far greater activity and in that decade the number of churches was doubled, ten churches opening their doors, three of them colored groups. In 1926 alone three churches were established, in 1928 two, and a similar number in 1929. In this list of ten will be found four of the largest groups in the state at the present time. This totals twenty churches of Christ in Michigan of more than twenty years of age.

During the thirties fourteen new congregations were born, including ten in and around Detroit and groups in the out-state cities of Lansing, Muskegon, Flint, and Shepherd. This brings the total to 34 or practically half of the total number of today's churches. And that brings us to the outstanding fact that the other half of the churches have been established during the last ten years. During every year since 1940 two or more new congregations have been started except in 1946 when only one began. The banner year was 1941 with nine new churches, while 1942 and 1944 each added five more. Since 1945 six new congregations have begun, including three in 1948 and one in 1949.

Therefore it can be seen that the Church of the Lord is beginning to make itself felt in the State of Michigan. The establishment of new churches in many different places means that New Testament Christianity is being taught on a far wider scale than ever before.

Homes of Michigan Churches of Christ

In these days when neat, well located commodious buildings seem necessary in order to put the Lord's people in a good light in a community it cannot be said that the churches of Christ in Michigan are well supplied with church homes. True, there are several very ade-

quate church buildings in the state, many of them just recently built, and there are several others which are reasonably adequate now but will soon be too small for the congregations. However about twenty of the churches are meeting in rented halls, schoolhouses, Y. M. C. A. buildings or even in private homes. While this may be necessary in many cases for a time, Christians should never be satisfied until the People of God are put in a favorable light among those who are seeking the Truth.

About fifty of the seventy-one churches own their own church homes. About a dozen of these are basement buildings. In each such case the brethren are planning to build the super-structure "as soon as possible." Several congregations which have started in this way have already completed their structures and others will complete theirs during the next few months if present plans materialize.

It is worthy of note that many of the newer buildings are very favorably located, getting the church of Christ "off the back street" where it has been found all too often in the past. Bringing this about has meant a great sacrifice on the part of Christians in Michigan, especially since so many new congregations have been started in the past ten years. This sacrifice will be rewarded by the rapid growth of the church and by the favorable impression which will be made upon people. It is hoped that in the near future one may travel from city to city and find loyal churches which have their own buildings, church homes which are well located, large enough to care for all who will come, and neat in appearance and comfortable, even as are the private homes in which we live.

Evangelists with Michigan Churches

Nearly one half of the churches of Christ in Michigan support full time evangelists. By this we mean that a preacher giving his full time to the work of evangelizing is supported by a congregation. Most of these churches are, of course, the larger churches and are located in the large cities, mainly in and around Detroit, Flint, Pontiac, and Lansing. However twenty three other churches have evangelists who preach on Lord's days but receive only part of their support, if any, from the church. They earn their livelihood in secular work. The remaining fifteen churches do not have evangelists except perhaps a speaker who comes occasionally on the Lord's day. A list of these evangelists will be found in the directory with the congregations for which they work. They are designated by (E).

Missionary Work of Michigan Churches

Fewer than one third of the Churches of Christ in Michigan are at present actively sponsoring or assisting evangelistic efforts beyond

their own local fields. In fact only three actual cases of "Sponsorship" were reported. Hayes Avenue Church in Detroit has undertaken the very worthy task of sponsoring Brother William Hatcher in Italy. Five other Detroit Churches lend assistance in this work. Joseph Campau Church has assumed full responsibility in sponsoring the colored work in Baldwin, Michigan. Summit Church has recently begun a missionary effort at Hart, fifteen miles to the south. In fact the Hart church is the only new congregation established in the state in 1949 if the reports are complete.

Three Detroit churches are assisting the Shewmakers in Africa and two churches are helping in Canada. The foreign missionary efforts are quite scattered with the work in India, Germany, Cuba, Mexico, and Philippines each receiving help from one church.

Several churches in the state are assisting other already established congregations in one way or another. All of these weaker groups are in Michigan except the Indian congregation at Oneida, Wisconsin, and the church at Kokomo, Indiana.

Two important facts should be noted here. First, Michigan churches which in recent years have been busy starting new congregations have at present transferred their assistance largely to foreign fields and are now quite inactive on the home front. Second, **nearly fifty churches, representing more than two thirds of the total, are inactive both in helping foreign evangelistic work and in helping to spread the Gospel in the United States.** It should not be inferred that helping in foreign work should be discouraged. God forbid. But how far-reaching would be the results if every church of Christ in this state would take an active and extensive part in sending the message of salvation to souls that are dying, either in our own midst or in far-away lands.

Michigan, A Field of Opportunity

One of the brethren in sending information wrote, "Michigan is our mission field." How true is that statement. An examination of the map will show that great areas in the state, including the entire Upper Peninsula and almost all of the northern half of the Lower Peninsula are waiting for the "sowing of the seed of the kingdom." Besides this, there are many counties in the southern part of the state which do not have a New Testament church. In all, about fifteen cities of ten thousand people or more are without such a congregation while several of the largest cities, including Muskegon, Bay City, Lansing, Battle Creek and Port Huron have only one congregation each and these churches are mainly small.

The City of Saginaw offers the greatest challenge to the churches of the state. This city of more than eighty thousand people and many more thousands in the surrounding territory is still without a church of the Lord. Several efforts have been made to start the work there but each has been short lived, even after fair sized groups had been assembled. Twelve miles to the north is the Bay City church, about thirty miles east is the church at Akron, thirty miles south are the six congregations in and around Flint and about twenty miles north-west is the church at Mapleton. But Saginaw, in the middle of them, is still waiting for the pure Gospel.

Another city of considerable size without a church is Kalamazoo. There are a few small congregations in different directions. The new church six miles north at Cooper Center may prove to be a focal point in moving into Celery City. Other cities of size below the Straits which do not have churches of Christ are Owosso, Midland (Mapleton is four miles away), Monroe (where there are brethren living), Muskegon Heights, Alpena, Holland and Traverse City. North of the Straits are Escanaba, Iron Mountain, Ironwood, Marquette, Sault Ste. Marie and other important centers, which, with all the surrounding country know not the church which Jesus built. How great is the challenge to the Christians of Michigan.

In response to our request for information several brethren told of isolated Christians in various parts of Michigan. Each of these Christians may be considered a potential starting point for a congregation. The following localities were named: West Branch, Barryton, Lachine, Fennville, Saginaw, Muskegon (colored), Coldwater, Union City, Newaygo, Rapid City, Frankfort, Reading, Birmingham, Trenton, Covert, Romeo, and Levering. There are undoubtedly many other Christians who do not have a church home within reach. These present other opportunities for real missionary work to Michigan Churches.

There is another great need in this state. Michigan is one of the leading tourist states, in fact, the most important in the North. Millions of vacationists come to visit our resorts and to use our unlimited resources of recreation. Among these are many Christians from the southern part of our country. Moreover many of our own number travel to the north for short or long periods. And many faithful disciples seek a place of worship where they may meet with other loyal Christians on the Lord's day. The number of inquiries as to the nearest church is unlimited. But all too often they must be told that there is no church of Christ within a reasonable distance. What a boon it would be to vacationing Christians to have churches at Traverse City, Petoskey and other places in Northern Michigan.