

5. German Church of God

Introduction

The Church of God's message of "salvation to sinners, sanctification to the redeemed, divine healing to the physically sick, and Christian unity to all true believers" came from the U. S. A. to western Canada in the early 20th century through writings such as the weekly *Gospel Trumpet* and the bi-monthly *Evangeliums Posaune*; and by immigrants, such as A. Scratch, who settled on a farm in southern Alberta in 1905, and William H. Smith, who came to Edmonton in 1906. After his arrival Smith immediately distributed literature and preached on street corners as well as in rented facilities in that city. He soon won Leonard E. Millensifer, an English and German-speaking settler from the north of Edmonton, for the Church of God. Now also Millensifer became very active in helping Smith spread the Church of God message among, especially, the many German-speaking people settling in Alberta.

In 1907 Gottlieb Butgereit, another Church of God leader, came from the U. S. A. and visited south-eastern Alberta. Being fluent in English and German he evangelized among the German-speaking immigrants from eastern Europe around Medicine Hat and won many adherents to the Church of God.

Within several years, a few congregations of German-speaking believers developed in Alberta. They were often led initially by lay people, and, as the groups grew, by ordained pastors. Congregations were easily organized when the number of adherents warranted it, but they also ceased to exist when people "fell away" or relocated from farms to towns. Important for the development of some congregations were the so-called "camp meetings," when believers from different localities met for common worship and mutual encouragement and fellowship. In the province of Alberta these typically week-long gatherings were held in such places as Edmonton, Wetaskiwin and Medicine Hat, where the congregations had become larger and had been able to construct church buildings. Services included much congregational singing and the sermons were in the languages of the attendees—often in English, German and Scandinavian. The various participants might have displayed many historical and cultural differences, but all got along well. By the time of the mid-1930s the German Church of God work grew well alongside of the English endeavor. However, slowly, especially the youth became more and more Anglicized. Many of the young people attended the English-language Church of God Bible School established in Camrose.

After the end of World War II many ethnic German Church of God believers from eastern Europe immigrated to Canada. Among them was Gustav Sonnenberg, one of their main leaders in Poland. Some previously well-established German Church of God congregations, such as those in Wetaskiwin and Medicine Hat, were greatly revitalized. In other places where only English-speaking Church of God congregations had existed, such as Edmonton and Calgary, new German Church of God congregations emerged. By 1955 the German-speaking congregation in Edmonton was numerically larger than the English counterpart in that city. During the 1950s the linguistic, cultural and some theological differences unfortunately discouraged the German Church of God leaders from gathering with their English-speaking brothers for the traditional annual pastors' meetings, and they decided to hold their own pastors' gatherings. In the 1960s the German Church of God maintained its own Bible School in Edmonton. To many people it appeared as if another "denomination" had developed.

Even though for many years the German language was extremely important to them in worship services and in church and family life—by 2017, all of the traditional German Church of God congregations in Alberta have become English-speaking. Throughout the past decades developments occurred, often symbolized by the new name a congregation decided to call itself. Nevertheless, for their future, all of the believers will

certainly want to fulfil the Christian task of being a "light in this world" and, undoubtedly, yearn for authentic unity of all Christians.

Arbeiter, Karl, born in Upper Silesia, Germany in 1868; immigrated to South Dakota in 1884; married Augusta Milde; served as Church of God missionary in Germany, Russia and Switzerland (1904–1919); pastored various German Church of God congregations in USA and Canada, including Medicine Hat, AB (1923–1925) and, at the same time, nearby Newburg, AB; died in 1949.

Babel, Herman Gustav, born in Mertensdorf, East Prussia, Germany in 1879; immigrated to USA in 1907; married Adeline Kinast in 1911; received theological training in Anderson, IN; worked for many years in the German department of the Gospel Trumpet Company in Anderson, IN, where the *Evangeliums Postsaune* was published; pastored various German Church of God congregations in the USA and Canada, including Medicine Hat, AB (1936–1942); arrived in Alberta from Indiana with his wife in 1936; became pastor at Medicine Hat and edited the *Missionsbote*; his wife, also an ordained minister, moved to Camrose and became vice-president of the Alberta Bible Institute; from 1936 to 1942 he also served as itinerant German Church of God pastor throughout western Canada; in the fall of 1937 Babel joined his wife at A.B.I. to teach German there; from 1941 on the short-lived A.B.I. Gospel Hour was broadcast over the radio under Babel's guidance every other Sunday in alternation with a broadcast in English prepared by H.C. Gardner; Pastor Babel died in 1966.

Berndt, Reinhard, born in Zelanka, Volhynia, Poland in 1932; immigrated to Canada in 1950; married Edeltraut Hildebrandt; attended the German Church of God Bible School in Edmonton, AB; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada, including Edmonton, AB (1965–1967, 1971–1988).

Berzins, Oscar, born in Rujiena, Latvia in 1936; attended Bible School in Fritzlar, Germany; married Helga Witzler; immigrated to the USA; pastored various Church of God congregations in the USA and Canada, including Edmonton German Church of God, Edmonton, AB (Mill Creek Church of God) (1996–2002); helped initiate and champion several key points of transition to more English-language services, a task that presented many challenges; died in 2007.

Brix, Alfred, born in Detmold, Germany in 1939; immigrated to Canada in 1957; attended German Church of God Bible School in Edmonton, AB; married Ingrid Keller; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada, including Mountview Church of God in Calgary, AB (1971–1982).

Brown, Michael B., born in Russia in April 1877 (1880?); immigrated to the USA and then to Canada in 1902; married Pauline Muth; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada and the USA, including Bruderheim, AB (1909–1914) and Medicine Hat, AB (1914–1916) along with Gottlieb Butgereit; died in 1965.

Butgereit, Gottlieb, born in East Prussia, Germany in 1863; immigrated to USA; married Fredericka Beck; was an itinerant German Church of God pastor in Wisconsin, North Dakota, Saskatchewan and Alberta; bilingual in English and German, he evangelized with great success in 1907 in Irvine, AB and Newburg, AB; pastored German Church of God congregation in Medicine Hat, AB (1914–1919) with varying success and, at the same time, nearby congregations in Irvine, AB, Newburg, AB, and Grayburn, AB along with Michael Brown; in 1932 Butgereit became president of the newly founded German Canadian Mission Board; Jakob Wien was the secretary and treasurer, and Gustav Liske the director; after 1919 Butgereit pastored several Church of God congregations in USA; died in 1941.

Friesen, Franz, born in Cuauhtémoc, Mexico in 1972; immigrated to Canada in 1975; married Carolyn Friesen; graduated from Mid-America Christian University; pastored various Church of God congregations in Canada, including, as a bi-lingual pastor, leading the German Church of God in Barrhead, AB (2005–

2007) to a predominantly English-speaking congregation; serves the German Church of God in Aylmer, ON.

Goertzen, David, born in Chihuahua, Mexico in 1973; immigrated to Canada in 1989; married Natalie Thiessen; pastored German Church of God congregation in Wetaskiwin, AB (2010–2014).

Hannich, Andreas, born in Marburg, Germany in 1957; attended Bible School in Fritzlar, Germany; married Ingrid Wolf; immigrated to Canada in 1981; attended Gardner Bible College, Camrose, AB; pastored various Church of God congregations in Canada and the USA, including Edmonton German Church of God in Edmonton, AB (1981–1982, 1987–1994) as Assistant Pastor.

Henschel, Erich, born in Herzogsfelde, Poland in 1928; son of Friedrich Henschel; immigrated to Canada in 1952; married Rita Huebner; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada, including Wetaskiwin, AB (1972–1981); died in 2016.

Henschel, Friedrich, born in Radom, Russia in 1899; married Adele Boss; immigrated to Canada in 1952; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada, including Manola, AB (1954–1958, 1968–1969); died in 1991.

Ilgert, Harold, born in Winnipeg, MB in 1951; attended German Bible School in Edmonton, AB; married Ingrid Raasch; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada, including German Church of God (Edmonton) AB, Barrhead, AB (1986–1991) and Calgary, AB (1997–2011).

Jakobsh, Josef, born in Sarnowka, Poland in 1930; immigrated to Canada in 1950; attended the German Church of God Bible School in Edmonton, AB; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada, including Medicine Hat, AB (1960–1963), Wetaskiwin, AB (1963–1968) and Calgary, AB (1982–1986); died in 2016.

Jeske, Rudolph, served Cherhill, AB (1940) and Fort Saskatchewan (Josephburg) (1960 and 1965).

Kauenhoven, David, born in the Chaco, Paraguay, South America in 1951; immigrated to Canada in 1970; attended German Church of God Bible School in Edmonton, AB; married Cornelia Henschel; pastored German Church of God in Barrhead, AB (1980–1985).

Klinger, Harry, born in Edmonton, AB, 1956; married Doris Lindner; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada, including Barrhead, AB (1991–1995).

Krause, Karl, born in Puchawa, Volhynia, Russia in 1903; immigrated to Canada in 1928; married Wanda Brust; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada, including Cherhill, AB (1929–1938), Medicine Hat, AB (1944–1953, 1957–1960, 1968–1978), Wetaskiwin, AB (1953–1957) and Manola, AB (1963–1968); died in 1987.

Krebs, Edmund, born in Kurasch, Volhynia, Russia in 1908; married Aurelie Henkelmann; immigrated to Canada in 1954; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada and USA, including the Mountview Church of God in Calgary, AB (1961–1964); served as teacher at the German Bible School in Edmonton, AB (1964–1967); died in 2019.

Krebs, Friedrich, born in Kurasch, Volhynia, Poland in 1933; immigrated to Canada in 1951; married Lyvia Streich; attended Bible School in Fritzlar, Germany; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada and Germany, including Calgary, AB (1964–1971); after the retirement of Gustav Sonnenberg served as speaker of the weekly German radio program “Botschaft des Heils,” broadcast over several stations in Alberta, Canada, USA and South America.

Lange, Arthur, born in Winnipeg, MB in 1943; attended German Church of God Bible School in Edmonton, AB; married Edith Kemp; pastored various German Church of God congregations in western Canada,

including Wetaskiwin, AB (1969–1972) and the Mountview Church of God Calgary Calgary, AB (1993–1997).

Lenk, Fritz, born in Gelsenkirchen, Germany in 1930; attended Bible School in Fritzlar, Germany; immigrated to USA in 1957, to Canada in 1977; pastored various German Church of God congregations in USA and Canada, including Edmonton German Church of God in Edmonton, AB (Mill Creek Church of God) (1977–1996); while in Edmonton, edited “Biblischer Standpunkt–Biblical Perspective,” sent to readers in Canada, U.S.A., South America and Germany; co-author with Helga Arendt, “Feed my sheep. A commentary on the First Letter of Peter” (Bloomington, IN, WestBow Press, 2014); for twenty years conducted the weekly radio broadcast “Aus der Welt des Glaubens” on CKER-FM, Edmonton, AB; lives in retirement in Edmonton, AB.

Liske, Gustav, born in Martinofka, Russia in 1889; married Leokadia Grabia; immigrated to Canada in 1927; pastored German Church of God congregations in Bruderheim, AB (1928–1932) and Manola (1946–1947); strong promoter of the “Deutsch Kanadische Mission” which began in 1932; died in 1947.

Makus, Waldemar, born in Sonnentäl, Warthegau, Germany in 1943; immigrated to Canada in 1962; attended German Church of God Bible School in Edmonton, AB; married Edith Popke; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada and the USA, including Wetaskiwin, AB (1990–1997).

Mantei, Daniel, born in Amelin, Volhynia, Russia in 1900; married Else Neumann; immigrated to Canada in 1952; pastored several German Church of God congregations in western Canada, including Manola, AB (1952–1954) and Barrhead; died in 1984.

Millens(e)ifer, Leonard, born of German parents in Oxford, Nebraska, USA, 1882; married Emma Stoll; immigrated to Canada in 1905; settled on a homestead near Edmonton; although he had only little formal theological training he soon became an accomplished preacher in both English and German; he gave up the farm and worked in various capacities, such as translator, evangelist and pastor; from 1908 to 1918 ministered as bilingual itinerant pastor to many isolated German-speaking immigrants throughout western Canada, especially Alberta; in 1909 he was involved in special meetings at Fort Saskatchewan, Bruderheim, Stony Plain and Edmonton; having proved himself in the ministry he was ordained about a year later; Millensifer moved to Edmonton in 1915 and after obtaining a school house for holding services he thought that the future looked bright; however, one year later he moved to Calgary in order to be able to fill more of his evangelistic calls and to visit the small churches that had no pastors; soon left for the USA. Years later, a call was made, and Millensifer returned to Alberta in 1922; with some aid from Anderson, Indiana he applied his energies to building a church for Edmonton's small congregation; he purchased property at 99th Street and 88th Ave in Edmonton, and the church was incorporated and registered in 1923; by the fall of 1923 services could be held in the basement of their own church; in addition to his tasks in Edmonton Millensifer assumed the oversight of the congregation in Bruderheim and made monthly calls to Provost and repeatedly visited other congregations in western Canada; because of his strenuous work Millensifer's health deteriorated and by 1926 he was semi-retired, but still willing to help; he pastored German Church of God congregations in Medicine Hat, AB (1926–1928) and, at the same time, in nearby Grayburn, AB; Irvine, AB; Newburg, AB; and Schuler, AB; died in 1948.

Nimz, Hans-Dietrich, born in Prussian Friedland, Pomerania, Germany in 1938; immigrated to Canada in 1962; attended German Church of God Bible School in Edmonton, AB; married Edeltraut Baier; pastored various German Church of God congregations in Canada and USA, including Edmonton, AB (1964–1968, 1988–1998) and Barrhead, AB (2002–2005).

6. German Congregational Church

Introduction

Congregational or Congregationalist churches are Protestant churches practicing congregationalist church governance, in which each congregation independently and autonomously runs its own affairs. Congregationalism is often considered to be a part of the wider Reformed tradition. In the United States and the United Kingdom, many Congregational churches claim their descent from Protestant denominations formed on a theory of union published by the theologian and English separatist Robert Browne in 1582.

Congregationalism in the United States was ideally suited to the frontier, and Missionary Superintendent Julius Reed, one of Iowa Congregationalism's "sacred seven," thought it could provide German immigrants with a well-anchored religious life. According to George Eisenach, premier historian of the German movement, Reed "secured a number of German ministers and missionaries from Germany and Switzerland and from denominations in this country which had German preaching." He also petitioned the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS) for financial support. The AHMS, organized by four denominations in 1826 but funded and directed mainly by Congregationalists and Presbyterians, supported a variety of German pastors and churches, including Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian, and Evangelical, in addition to Congregationalists. For example, no fewer than twenty-one pastors of the *Kirchenverein des Westen* (later the German Evangelical Synod of North America) received half their salaries from the AHMS between 1841 and 1862.

However, had it not been for the influx of large numbers of German-speaking natives of Russia into the United States and Canada in the decades before and after 1900, the history of German Congregationalism in the U.S. would be very short, highlighting a small band of *Reiseprediger* (traveling preachers) and the congregations they gathered in the Middle West. The immigration of these Germans from South Russia and the Volga region, beginning in 1872–73, brought a new urgency to the German work. Although foreign to most native Germans, Congregationalism appealed to Protestant Russlanddeutschen (Russia Germans), particularly those from Lutheran parishes. They had been raised in a milder Lutheranism than was often encountered in the United States, and some had actually experienced revival and regeneration in Russia. Mid-nineteenth century American Congregationalism offered a style of church life that was seemingly designed for them.

Lutheran in name only, some Russia Germans found the kind of spirituality they had known in Russia in the small Congregational churches. By 1890 the pastors who were trained in Chicago's Theological Seminary German department had begun serving in local churches. Russian Germans, they understood the people and their ways. Revivals broke out in many places. New churches were founded. In 1895 there were 110 churches with a combined membership of 4,728. Fifteen years later the numbers had grown to 202 churches with 11,435 members.

The growth of German Congregationalism spawned associations and state conferences in areas where churches were concentrated. The first German association was organized in Iowa, in 1862, and the first state conference, in Nebraska, in 1879. Although German Congregational associations and conferences were separate from their English-speaking counterparts, they did maintain relations with them, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on local leadership.

As a direct consequence, the term "Congregational Church" fell into disuse, and virtually disappeared in Canada. A remnant of churches still congregational in polity were concentrated in Southern Ontario, and were known as the "Ontario Christian Churches". These churches affiliated with the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference in the United States in 1965, but retained their independence as a separate conference. In response to the growing theological liberalism of the United Church of Canada, and following

(in particular) its 1988 decision to ordain openly practising homosexual individuals to the ministry, a group of conscientious objectors left the denomination and began looking for ways in which to cultivate their evangelical Christian faith, and to affiliate with others of like mind. This group became aware of the Ontario Christian Churches, and began the process of joining with them. Out of these discussions, a new organization was formed: the Congregational Christian Churches in Canada. They represent about 60 evangelical churches in Canada, four of them located in Alberta (2017).

The German-heritage Canadian congregations (thirty-one churches that had been affiliated with the General Conference) as well as other Congregational groups in Canada and the Methodists and Presbyterians merged to form the United Church of Canada in 1925. During the 1930s there were still enough German-speaking pastors to serve them, but then many congregations were dissolved because of a lack of German-speaking pastors coming from the United States.

In Alberta, Congregational churches were established in Calgary (1911), Hilda (1912), Beiseker (1913), Three Hills (1914), Schuler (1914), Newberg (1915), Mayton (1917), Walsh (1917), Sunnyslope and Schuler (1918). There was a German Congregational Church in Medicine Hat as well. In 1925 Congregational churches were located in Calgary, Hopefield, Mayton and Beiseker, Trochu and Three Hills; Walsh, Irvine and Gros Ventre, Hilda and Schuler, and Hanna. Missions also existed in Coronation/Federal and Duffield.

Anhorn, Friedrich G., served Blue Grass, ND (1911); Beiseker/Three Hills/Mayton/Sunnyslope AB (in the 1910s); Ebenezer, Calgary, AB (1913–1916); Billings, MT (1927) – German Congregational Church.

Bernstein, Elias, born on September 5, 1859 in Rovno, Russia (probably now Rovno/Rivne, Ukraine); parents: Abraham Bernstein, merchant and landowner; married to Sarah, daughter of the high school teacher Salomo Hillelson; grew up with his grandfather S. Hillelson and attended high school in Rovno; converted from Judaism; served Walsh, AB (in the 1910s); died on April 22, 1930 with the service in the First German Methodist Church; the funeral service was led by Pastor Zurbuchen as well as Dr. Kuper and Missionary Gittel, the last two active in Jewish Missions.

Dietrich, H. J., served in Golden Valley, ND (1912); Ebenezer German Congregational Church in Calgary, AB (1916–1920); in Worden, MT and Billings MT (from at least 1933–1937) – German Congregational Church.

Graus, F. D., served Hilda, AB (1924) – German Congregational Church.

Gross, F. W., served Hilda/Schuler, AB (1925 to at least 1926); the parish consisted of Zion in Hilda itself and Friedens, north of Hilda, and Immanuel, west of Hilda, and also included Hoffnungs/Hope and Mattheus/St. Matthew congregations in Schuler, AB – German Congregational Church.

Hediger, Paul R., served Ebenezer, Calgary, AB (1925–1939) and, at least, in 1926, also Hoffungsfeld, Castor, AB; missions in Duffield and Federal, AB – German Congregational Church.

Heuer, Gustav, served Ebenezer, Calgary, AB (1923–1925) and Castor, AB (1924); Zion, Trochu/Zion, Three Hills, AB (1925–1926) – German Congregational Church.

Heuer, H. served Zion, Beiseker and Salem, Mayton, AB (1926) – German Congregational Church.

Hildebrandt, Ed., served Walsh and Gros Ventre, AB (1922) – German Congregational Church.

Hochstatter, John A., born on December 19, 1889 in Java, SD; graduated from Redfield College Seminary in Redfield, SD; attended Yankton College, Yankton, SD graduating with an M.A. in 1913; was a postal clerk and student minister in Lesterville while studying in Yankton; married Lydia Saylor (August 26, 1913); studied at Chicago Theological Seminary and graduated with honours and a B.D.; served Plevan, MT;

Worden/MT; served Hilda, AB and Schuler, AB (1922—a few years in Canada); Wapato, WA and Quincy, WA (1925–1930); Loveland, CO; retired in 1942 due to failing health; he and his wife retired to Boulder, CO in 1942; died on January 11 or 12, 1965 – German Congregational Church.

Kessler, Jacob, born on April 6, 1893 in Glueckstal, Russian Empire (now Ukraine or Transdnistria); parents: Peter Kessler and Katherine Klein; immigrated to Glen Ullin, ND (1903); studied at Redfield, SD Seminary, apparently graduating in 1921; was ordained in Beiseker, AB; married Esther Helena Mutschelknaus (June 12, 1921) in Mott, ND; served Hanna, AB (1922) and Zoar, Gros Ventre, AB (1924–1926); Irvine (now Peace United Church of Canada), AB (1925–1926); he is listed as also serving Bethel and Pilgrim congregations at Irvine, AB (1926) as well as Friedens/Peace at Walsh, AB; returned to the USA and served in Willa, ND; Bowdle, SD and Walla Walla, WA; retired due to ill health and did interim pastoring in Colfax, Endicott, La Crosse, Odessa and Wapato, WA; in later years he joined the Missionary Alliance Church; died on May 9, 1985 in Walla Walla, WA with the funeral at Groseclose Garden Chapel, Walla Walla with burial at Blue Mountain Memorial Garden Chapel and Pastor Steve Morris officiating – German Congregational Church.