

TWENTY YEARS WITH THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF BOZEMAN

→ October 14, 1993, marked the twentieth anniversary of the Evangelical Church of North America/Evangelical Free congregation, now located at 1701 North 19th in Bozeman. In these twenty years the congregation has grown from its inauspicious start with nine at the first worship service to currently about 400 a Sunday.

Sunday School that first day was even less promising; besides the pastor, his wife, and their small child, only one other person came--an older woman who never returned. Perhaps the "new congregation" was even smaller than she anticipated.

Chris and Judy Blackmore had come on staff at Montana State University in Bozeman with Campus Crusade for Christ in the fall of 1970. They were transferred to Missoula in January of 1972 to start the Campus Crusade ministry there.

After a year-and-a-half in Missoula, where they fellowshipped with the ECNA congregation, he indicated an interest in the pastorate. Bob Strutz, ECNA district superintendent, suggested that the Blackmores open an ECNA church in Bozeman. The former ECNA congregation had disbanded about two years before.

In 1973 the annual conference of ECNA had voted to support a family to start a work in Bozeman, beginning in September that year. Accordingly, the Blackmores arrived and began visiting door to door and holding home Bible studies. The first Sunday services were held in the their home.

When the Blackmores first arrived in Bozeman, they had stayed in the Mountain View Motel, operated by the Dave Lockie family. Chris and Judy had purchased a home adjacent to the motel, and at that initial worship service, Dave was the first one through the door. (His wife and family had gone to North Dakota for a visit.)

The second Sunday only eight people attended. The pastor calculated that, at that rate, at least six Sundays were guaranteed! However, the third Sunday found 23 present, and the attendance continued to grow. By the end of December a high of 32 had been reached, and the Blackmore's home could no longer accommodate the growing congregation. A search for a larger facility began in earnest.

When Pastor Blackmore absented himself to perform his father's wedding ceremony, Dave Lockie was left in charge of the Sunday services. His sister recalls that all 12 people in attendance that day were related in some way to either him or his wife Jennie. This was the first ECNA service his parents attended --and they've been coming ever since!

The beginning of 1974 heralded a move to the UTC building (the old Moose Lodge), near the cemetery--now Lindley Park Center. Friday or Saturday night the rent for the building was \$50.00, but

Sunday rent was a bargain at \$10.00. There was a catch, however. After Saturday night's revelry, the place smelled like a brewery so Chris and Dave regularly arrived a couple hours early Sunday morning to clean it. One worshipper commented that it was the easiest place to get drunk in the spirit, just breathing the air!

This hall was basically one large room so they closed off the bar and kitchen area to provide a classroom for the children. The congregation at this time was largely young people, college age, so one morning at the close of Sunday school someone prayed specifically that God would bring some older people. Sunday school closed, and as they looked up, Lester Huddleston walked in. He was close to 90 so now they had both extremes in terms of age, but there were not many in between.

After nine or ten months the congregation had grown from 20 or 30 to 60-80 so again they needed more space. They approached the Seventh Day Adventists, corner of Main and 15th, about renting from them, but three other groups were meeting there. The search continued.

They looked at a duplex on Garfield where a church had been meeting, but that wasn't much larger than the Moose Lodge. The Faith Methodist building appeared to be a possibility, but the Salvation Army had already made an offer to buy so when that offer was accepted by the Methodists, ECNA had to continue to look elsewhere.

In the fall of 1974, "When the fullness of time had come" (in other words, in God's timing), Pastor Chris was seated next to the Seventh Day Adventist pastor at a ministerial meeting. As they visited, the pastor indicated that they would now be in a position to rent to ECNA as only one other group was using their building on Sunday.

The Lutherans were meeting at eleven o'clock so ECNA met earlier. This arrangement continued for several weeks, then the Lutherans moved so ECNA had the entire facility. Highest attendance that year was 159. Eleven people indicated they had prayed to receive Christ.

Home Bible studies, a key element of the ECNA program from its inception, continued to receive high priority with continued expansion in 1975. By that fall attendance had reached a high of 221 with seven committing their lives to Christ.

Continued growth in 1976, with a high of 382, necessitated a second service. Over 120 were involved in weekly Bible studies; 13 received Christ, and three rededicated their lives. Greater spiritual maturity and leadership were becoming evident in those involved in the church.

All the while, Judy was working tirelessly behind the scenes, hosting the first worship services; Bible studies, and class

parties; organizing, teaching, enlisting teachers, ad infinitum.

As the church grew, so did the need for various other ministries. Programs for youth; singles; women; men; children's church; "small church"; retreats; potlucks; visitation; recreational activities, and Saltshaker Dinners were some of the expanded activities. A Sunday school class for toddlers was started by Mary Jean Gaskill.

Perhaps one of the most ambitious programs undertaken was the bringing of a boat-refugee family to the Gallatin Valley. In early 1980 some members of the congregation challenged the body to reach out to some refugees by bringing them to the area and underwriting their support until they could support themselves.

The first family assigned could not be located when they were scheduled to come in June so the Eam Chhen family was selected. The Chhen family consisted of Eam; his wife Hoar Tran; a nine-year-old boy, Hieng Tran; a six-year-old girl, Guek Tran; and a two-month-old girl, Ly Tran.

The Chhens arrived in September, 1980. Eam began working for Dan Mecklenburg, learning carpentry skills, daily riding a bicycle 16 miles round trip to work. Before long he was working at two other jobs as well. The Chhens made rapid progress toward becoming self-supporting and became United State citizens. Later they moved to Philadelphia where they were able to go into business for themselves.

Average Sunday morning attendance in 1980 was 274, up from 1979's average of 256. In October of that year the congregation began considering the need for a pastor of visitation and initiated some exploration toward that end. Merton Peterson, a veteran pastor with ECNA, was selected and began serving in September, 1981. His wife Joanie was soon serving as church secretary--and in many other capacities as well!

Crowded conditions made acquisition of more space for Sunday school classes imperative, and there wasn't time to wait for land purchase/building. The Council of Administration considered many options, but it wasn't until the house, just two doors north of the Adventist Church and owned by the Adventists, was put on the market that a decision was made. December 2, 1981, "the Board of Directors of the Evangelical Church of Bozeman resolved to purchase the house and property at 108 North 15th Street for the price of \$64,000." (Council of Administration minutes)

Purchase of this property not only furnished added classrooms but also provided office space, a recreation area, and a facility for social events such as potlucks, etc. The three bedrooms were rented out with the income helping make the monthly payments on the house.

Beginning the first Sunday in April, 1982, the Sunday morning format was changed to three worship services, 8:45, 10:00, and 11:15. Sunday school classes were conducted as usual at 10:00. When the college quarter ended June 13 the traditional schedule was resumed. This routine continued for several years.

On the evening of June 5, 1983, the congregation met to discuss the possibility of purchasing land and eventually building. The local Seventh Day Adventist congregation had been directed by their national headquarters to suggest that we start looking for another facility because they could not guarantee continued availability of their building. The outcome of the evening meeting was a decision to start looking for land.

One of the criteria for determining suitability of land to be purchased was that it should be within walking distance of the University. That criterion was met in a plot of land located across from the University, corner of 19th and Lincoln.

This land was owned by Ralph Aker who, when contacted, said he'd be willing to sell. On June 30, 1983, the congregation voted almost unanimously to purchase 10 acres, pending approval of the zone change by the city commission.

At that point the consensus of the Board of Administration was to proceed on a cash basis only. \$27,000 earnest money was needed for the land purchase, and if the money was not on hand, there would be no purchase.

When negotiations with Mr. Aker, continuing throughout the remainder of 1983, were settled, cash on hand amounted to \$24,000 with \$80,000 in pledges. Someone pointed out that the agreement before the Lord was that we would have the full amount in cash or we would not buy. To satisfy this condition the acreage to be purchased was reduced to five instead of the original 10.

Negotiations with Mr. ^{Aker} were just a start of the purchase process. Since the land was located across Lincoln from the University's Animal Disease Control Center, the University immediately took an active interest in the procedures. Another four years would go by before all the problems between the city and the University were resolved.

When the land had been purchased and the building erected, Clair Daines noted at the dedication service that at a city commission meeting on the zone change, someone raised a question regarding the city's liability "if disease gets out of the lab and kills thousands of people." Clair commented that he was tempted to get up and say, "Chris Blackmore is a great evangelist, but he's not that good!"

The December 8, 1985, Council of Administration minutes recorded that Land & Building Committee chairman Mark Bryan estimated that all the legal requirements would be met and the land

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sale completed by the end of January, 1986. In reality it was the last day of 1986 when the sale/purchase was completed.

This was typical of the rate of progress throughout the land purchase proceedings. But the long-drawn-out process, testing the patience and faith of the congregation, proved to "work for good".

The purchase price of the land was \$125,000. In the-almost-four years of wrangling between the University and the city, God had raised more than \$151,000 so the congregation, instead of having to borrow money and pay interest, had had funds earning interest.

Final papers were signed and the full purchase price was wired out at 10:30, December 31, 1986. Deadline for payment was 1:30, December 31, or the deal would have been off. "Do not be anxious about anything..." Philippians 4:6.

It was that same year, 1986. that Pastor Roy Anderson and his wife Gladys decided it was time, because of their advancing years, to move closer to family. They had had a long and fruitful ministry in the pastorate, serving several denominations. After retirement they had located in Bozeman and had been an integral part of the ECNA congregation. Their daughter Phyllis and her husband Myron Schultz lived in the eastern part of the state so after a farewell open house for the Andersons, hosted by George and Olive Lockie (May 26), they moved to Glendive.

With the land ~~was~~ secure, preparations for building could proceed. Again there was money to be raised. Several years of fund-raising would precede construction, but the way was now cleared for implementation of another project.

Pastor Chris for some time had had a vision for erecting a large wooden cross on the church property. This would be a special cross with a carving and lighting effect so that at night there would appear to be the figure of a man hanging on the cross.

Dave Callaway, a talented artist in the congregation, was willing to work on the project and was able to achieve the desired effect, but it took the joint efforts of the artist, some electricians, general contractors, advisers, and considerable experimentation before the lighting was satisfactory. Much credit goes to Jere and Grant Eickelberg.

The cross, in place on the northwest corner of the property, was dedicated August 6, 1989, just before the Callaways moved to Florida. A potluck dinner on the site was enjoyed that day, and farewells were said to the Callaways and others of the Body, too, before they left for school or jobs elsewhere.

In the spring of 1986 a decision was made to phase out the position of Pastor of Visitation, effective June 30 that year. More than two years elapsed before another member was added to the pastoral staff.

As time went by, the need for a youth pastor had become increasingly evident so Brett LaShelle from Boise, Idaho, was invited to become Associate Pastor. His special emphasis was to be on youth and family. Brett and his wife Roberta joined the ministry in September, 1988.

For several years some of the leadership in the congregation had been concerned about differences in goals and philosophies with

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the Evangelical Church of North America.

After 14 years involvement with the ECNA, the congregation, upon the recommendation of the Affiliation Study Committee, voted on December 6, 1987, to disaffiliate with the denomination.

The committee noted: "This did not stem from anger or even disappointment with the ECNA. It is a realization that our local church is just not pulling in the same direction as the denomination, and therefore we are not unified nor as efficient in seeing the Kingdom expanded.

"If disaffiliation occurs, we would recommend exploring possible affiliation with another denomination whose goals and polity are harmonious with ours."

Respectfully submitted,

The Affiliation Study Committee,
Dave Lockie
Les Witmer
Chris Blackmore

It would be a year-and-a half before the congregation made a commitment to another denomination. After a time of search and an acceptance by the Evangelical Free Church, the congregation voted April 17, 1988, to affiliate with the E. Free.

While that decision seemingly had little to do with the building program, it turned out that it was to have a significant impact.

On April 16, 1988, the congregation had voted on a recommendation by the Land & Building Committee, the Board of Elders, and the Board of Deacons to target May 1, 1990, for beginning actual construction of the new building. The vote favored the recommendation 58-2.

That vote reflected a compromise. When plans for buying land and building were first discussed, the consensus--at least the presentation by the most vocal element--had been to advance on a cash basis only. That had worked well for the land purchase, but the sum to be raised now was considerably larger. Was it good stewardship to wait?

After much discussion of the pros and cons, weighing the advantages of each option, an agreement was reached to proceed with 50% equity and 50% debt. The loan was approved and ground broken May 6, 1990.

As building plans were developing, the building committee had hoped to be able to build for \$50. per square foot. Then they dared hope they might be able to do it for \$30. per square foot.

Many donations of materials and much volunteer labor, at a time when the construction industry was "operating at 150 %" (a Clair Daines quote) helped contain the building costs. The final figure proved to be close to the lower estimate. That was a real miracle!

A factor that contributed to that miracle was the affiliation with the Evangelical Free Church. The Beacon, the denomination's official organ, was made available to members. In the November, 1988, issue Clair Daines noticed an ad for financing the building of churches. The ad said that \$500,000 was available on a 20-year note.

The hardest thing in the world, Clair observed, is finding money to finance the building of a church. This sounded too good to be true, but he sent for the information. He received "two skinny pages" to fill out.

Having dealt with the usual "five pounds of paper" it takes to finance a house, Daines called and asked, "Are you sure you know what you are doing?"

He was talking to an old banker who assured him he did know what he was doing. When Clair asked how he could do this with so little documentation, the banker replied that he "trusted the Lord" and "trusted the people out there."

He went on to say, "In the entire time I've been in this job, we've never lost a dime financing churches through this system." He'd been at it three or four years.

That providential funding "was one of the real keys to this building being here today," Clair stated at the dedication service after the building was completed.

MOVE

The Adventists had been apprised that we would terminate our rental agreement with them at the end of 1990. That meant, ready or not, we would begin meeting in our own building the first Sunday of 1991.

Workmen worked feverishly to complete essentials for occupancy. Not all work had been completed, but we had heat and light and the sound system and chairs. January 6, 1991, found the congregation worshipping in the new church home.

In preparation for that momentous occasion a twenty-four-hour prayer vigil had been held from 10 A.M. December 31, 1990 to 10 A.M. January 1, 1991.

The worship wing was finished and the ministry center dedicated February 24. Work on the education wing continued for some time. ~~Many~~ friends from other ^{WFF's} churches ^{WV} joined ^{WV} in the dedication celebration, an afternoon open house..

At the dedication service Dave Lockie, reviewing the progression of events leading to ownership rather than rental of a worship site, emphasized, "We can only say positive things about the way the local Seventh Day Adventist congregation has treated us. They have gone out of their way many times to meet our needs. Rent has been extremely reasonable.

"The national organization of the Adventists felt strongly that the seventh day is the day for corporate worship. It was a kindness on their part to allow a church getting started or in the process of building to rent. However, once it provided a permanent meeting place, it seemed like a real compromise on their stand.

"Because of pressures from the national headquarters the local congregation suggested we start looking for another facility, allowing three to six years. That," Dave continued, "was what really pushed us out to start looking for land."

As he spoke, Dave couldn't resist telling a story on Art Shellenberg. Art had been at the building site virtually every day, helping wherever help was needed. When the time came to start the inside painting, it was Art who rounded up a crew of volunteers. (He had been turned down so many times that he finally declared he would not make another phone call, but he did get his crew.)

He got bids, ordered the paint, cleared with the committee, and started painting. When the job was almost done, he realized they were running low on paint. The committee was real hard-nosed about the budget and tried to hold the line so Art was a little apprehensive about asking for more paint.

Since they were using latex ~~so~~ Art reasoned, "If I add a little bit

of water, I can stretch my paint". So he did.

They were on the last room, and they had all but one end painted. The paint stretched. But then, up in one corner, the molding had to be changed. And they were out of paint.

At that point the resourceful Art, according to Dave's story, gathered the paint brushes, rollers, and roller pans, added a little more water and swished it around. He got a ladder, climbed up there, and sure enough, he got it painted, and you can't even tell it! But Dave wasn't through with his story.

After the painting was done, Art was working alone in the building when a terrific thunder storm hit. After a bright flash, he waited but there was no thunder. Instead here came a booming voice out of the clouds: "Repaint, and thin no more!" "Don't know if you've noticed," Dave added, "but since that day, Art's been a different guy."

Steve Watkins, superintendent of the Evangelical Free ^{Northern} Mountain District, gave the dedication address, using as his text Exodus 40:9,10--dedication of the tabernacle in the wilderness--and verses 34,35: "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle..."

One of the emphases for the new facility was that it should be a ministry center, not just a church house to be used on Sunday and perhaps for a midweek service. (The "Church House" was the building two doors north of the Adventist Church, sold after the move to this present location.)

Careful planning went into the design; consultation with and input from individuals representing various interests promoted achievement of that goal.

In the almost-two years that the congregation has been here the center has indeed been widely used, by the congregation and beyond. Heritage Christian School used it for classroom space the '91-'92, '92-'93 school years; Bible Study Fellowship met here '91-'92, '92-'93, and is currently doing so; an interdenominational Bible study for men is in its third year; this is the second year for the Awana program.

The list goes on: Campus Crusade for Christ staff meetings; Intervarsity; Home School Association; Pregnancy Problem Center; Christian Writers' group; many Bible studies as well numerous weddings --couples within the congregation and from outside this fellowship. The desire that this facility be a ministry center is being fulfilled.