

Cleveland Heights Christian Church (CHCC) began in 1921, when Charles and Rose Dispenza established a Sunday School in their home on Clover Place. They had been members of the Trenton Street Italian Mission in Buffalo, which had in turn been sponsored by the Prospect Avenue Baptist Church. Since there was no Protestant church in the vicinity of Genesee Street and the city line, Mrs. Dispenza felt there was a great need for missionary service there.

The Dispenzas appealed to the Northern Baptist Convention, the parent body of the church from which they came, to help get this mission started. Finding nobody who could give leadership to the project, the Rev. Alva Dutton, Executive Secretary of the Northern Baptist Convention, asked the Rev. Ernest Hunter Wray, Pastor of Richmond Avenue Church of Christ (Disciples), to sponsor this mission. At a Board meeting at Richmond Avenue, G. M. Kirby, T.E. Tynes, O.H. Seymour, E. Howard and S. B. Lindsay volunteered to serve as a committee to investigate the need for mission work "among a group of Italians living near the city line."

As the mission was outgrowing the Dispenza home, they began to feel the need for a building in which to carry on the work. Mr. Kirby reported to the Richmond Avenue Board the need for a mission in Cheektowaga and proposed a plan to assist families who were interested in "purchasing a lot and erecting a suitable building for church and school purposes." Thus began the relationship

of the Cheektowaga mission with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

. On January 15, 1923, Dr. Ben Long and Samuel Lindsay, representing the trustees of Richmond Avenue Church, purchased four lots on Genesee Street at Meadow Place. A building 24 x 40 feet was erected. Richmond Avenue Church assumed the debt of \$2,300, and the Chapel Park Christian Mission was formed.

Rev. Wray, with his co-workers, Miss Addie Arnold, Miss Mildred Tiffany and other workers from Richmond Avenue Church, carried on the work in Cheektowaga for over seven years. Twenty-eight members were baptized in 1924-25. Mr. Michael Anzalone became interested in the work and became minister for about two years, beginning in 1933, with Richmond Avenue Church still supporting the mission.

Various individuals gave leadership to the struggling mission for the next five or six years. As 1940 dawned, the treasurer reported a balance of \$28.59.

The mission remained small, but Miss Helen Dispenza recalled that it was "great the way everyone pitched in and helped, and everyone knew everybody else."

In April 14, 1940, the Reverend Mr. Trewalla, then pastor of Richmond Avenue Church and chairman of the Committee on Promoting Cheektowaga Mission work, called a special meeting at which time Miss Marian Gibson resigned as leader; and Mr. and Mrs. Richards were asked to stay on to help in the organization of the church until

a minister could be secured to take over part time. In May, a committee suggested that a minister be secured to serve both the Woodlawn and Cheektowaga churches with support from the Western District, the Frontier Men's Organization, and the New York Christian Missionary Society.

In the meantime, Mr. and Mrs. Richards held several revival meetings during which 16 people were baptized. On May 14, 1940, the mission was reorganized as the Cheektowaga Church of Christ.

In October 1940, the Rev. Hollis Turley, pastor of Central Church of Christ, asked James Simpson to take over the work of the mission. At this point attendance had dwindled to about four faithful souls. Mr. Simpson preached on Sundays, and Mrs. Simpson and Helen Dispenza developed the Sunday School which grew rapidly. In 1941, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Hockenberger, members of Central Church of Christ, assumed leadership in the Sunday School. During 1942 and 1943 the Quimby and Hastings families joined the little band of workers, and soon Mrs. Hastings had a Christian Endeavor group in progress.

From Board minutes, Nov. 7, 1942: The committee reporting on putting on an addition or some convenience for rest rooms advised that this would not be practical as the sewer would have to be put across Genesee Street, which would be too expensive. Mention was made to move to a new location, but not at the present time

with labor and building conditions as they are. The building committee decided to carry on until after the War.”

From Board minutes, Mar. 28, 1943: "It was voted to give each boy entering the service a bullet-proof Testament. Owing to the pleasure ban and lack of transportation our picnic was given up."

In the Fall of 1943, the Sunday School had been reorganized with Dewey Hastings as Superintendent. The room was curtained off to provide individual classrooms for graded lessons. By March of 1944, it was apparent that more space would be needed. A consecration service was held with about forty people banding together to work for the reorganizing of the church with plans for expansion. They had been paying the interest on the mortgage for over two years and had well over \$2,000 in a building fund.

In June 1944, the mortgage held by Richmond Avenue Church was assumed by the New York Christian Missionary Society (now the Northeastern Region). At that time, the churches of the Niagara Frontier at the urging of the Rev. Craig Schwartz of Payne Avenue Church, Harley Patterson of Richmond Avenue Church, Mr. Winfield of University Church met with the congregation to devise a plan for a new building.

The Frontier Churches (Western District) would finance it as a home mission project. A committee composed of one representative from each church in the District with Mr. Schwartz as chair, secured the services

of James S. Whitman as architect. A construction contract was awarded to the Bornman Company for \$41,000. Twenty-five thousand dollars was secured from the Board of Church Extension with the \$16,000 to be paid in cash by churches of the District on or before Dedication Day.

Feeling the need for a full-time pastor in the field, the Church extended a call to the Rev. Robert Fink, a graduate of Phillips University in Enid, Oklahoma. On September 15, 1945, Mr. Fink became their first permanent minister.

Since the country was still involved in the Second World War, the congregation was unable to break ground until March 10, 1946. Rev. Thomas Miller, Rev. Craig Schwartz, James Simpson, and Dewey Hastings turned the first sod, thus beginning a whole new era in the life of the Cheektowaga church. Symbolic of this great transition, the name was again changed to Cleveland Heights Church of Christ (Disciples of Christ).

On May 26, 1946, the cornerstone was laid, "A consummation of our fondest hopes and trust in the Lord." Helena Quimby, church historian, completed her remarks on that occasion by saying:

"God has been our Guide in all we have done; and with the churches of the Niagara Frontier behind us, we see a bright future for Cleveland Heights Church of Christ to go forward as a mighty warrior into bigger fields. We are happy today to stand with Rose Dispenza and to thank

God for her sense of responsibility in spreading the Gospel in her community, which has been indirectly the means of building this church.”

Dedication services were held February 2, 1947, led by the Rev. Craig Schwartz, chair of the Rural and Suburban Committee of the Disciples Union of Western New York. The Rev. Robert Fink, church pastor, the Rev. Harlan Frost, executive director of the Buffalo Council of Churches, the Rev. Thomas Miller, executive secretary of the New York Christian Missionary Society, and the Rev. William Percy of the Board of Church Extension, and the Rev. James Saylor shared in the service.

The church became not only a worshipping community, but a center for community activities like scouts, home bureau units and the like. Longtime residents of this area still point back to those days when they attended meetings in the “old church.”

After Mr. Fink’s resignation in 1947, the Rev. Urban Ogden was called as pastor. During his ministry, the Parsonage was completed adjacent to the church in April of 1948. Mr. Ogden resigned in 1952. The Rev. Alfred Herman served the church as pastor 1952-1955.

On March 10, 1956, the Rev. Raymond Hite became pastor. During his six-year ministry, the church became self-supporting for the first time. The congregation was incorporated in February 1957 as Cleveland Heights Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

In April 1958, Central Church of Christ in Buffalo disbanded and sold its building on Ferry and Lonsdale. Seventy-six former members of Central Church were received into membership at Cleveland Heights. They brought with them \$25,786 in liquidated assets.

With continued growth in the community and a membership of 249, it was then time to consider expansion again. Charles Betts of the Board of Church Extension submitted a plan for a new \$125,000 sanctuary building with architectural lines similar to the original church building. After much study, however, the more contemporary designs of Clarence Donath, an architect from East Aurora, were accepted by the congregation in 1959.

The cost of the new sanctuary, connecting wing, fixtures, furnishings and alterations to the existing structure creating Sunday School and fellowship space, was estimated at \$115,000.

A Bayne Driskill evangelistic campaign in 1960 added 103 new members to the congregation.

Ground was broken for the new Sanctuary in October of 1960. The cornerstone was laid on November 6, 1960, and the building was formally dedicated Easter Sunday, April 30, 1961. Our present house of worship is in a "contemporary gothic" style with attractive arches supporting the natural wood ceiling. Tones of brick and wood are enhanced by the brilliant blue rug that goes

down the center aisle. The free-standing baptistery is another unusual feature of the building.

Mr. Hite completed his ministry in Cheektowaga and preached his final sermon June 24, 1962.

Rev. Sanders East became minister in February 1963, and resigned after a two-year ministry. He was succeeded in 1965 by the Rev. Herbert Cunningham, who brought much healing and stability to the church.

Mr. Cunningham's ministry was cut short when he fell and broke his hip. Although he valiantly attempted to regain his health and serve the church, when serum hepatitis developed, it became necessary for him to resign. He preached his last sermon in Cheektowaga June 7, 1970.

Rev. Kenneth W. Neal became pastor September 1, 1970. The installation service in October featured a triumphant procession of church officers carrying banners, and included among the guests the Rev. Charles Lamb of East Aurora, the Rev. Charles Smith of Maryvale Presbyterian Church, the Rev. Carl Viehe of St. Stephens-Bethlehem United Church of Christ, and the Rev. Arthur J. Stanley, regional minister of the Northeastern Association of Christian Churches (now the Northeastern Region).

The church celebrated its 50th Anniversary with a special community service on October 24, 1971. Mrs. Julia Reinstein, town historian, was the featured speaker. Her presence helped the congregation to see the church in

the context of the entire area. In cooperation with the Youth Bureau, Cleveland Heights became the site of a community-wide youth coffeehouse in 1972. This was also the beginning of a series of "Think Tanks" as the congregation sought adjust to the changes in the latter half of the century.

A major accomplishment in 1973 was the paving and enlarging of the parking lot. Prior to that time, people and cars had to dodge rather large potholes.

A real breakthrough came when we held our first "Lay Witness Mission" in 1974. Feeling that the congregation had reached a "plateau," the Official Board approved in principle an "Operation Blitz," designed to shore up portions of the church's life and ministry that seemed to need more emphasis. This included a major stewardship campaign called "The Commitment Plan."

As a follow-up to Lay Witness Mission, A Spiritual Discovery Weekend and "Come, Follow me" were held in 1975 and 1976 respectively. This deepening of the spiritual life of the congregation paved the way for the growth of the '80s.

The winter of 1976-77 saw the widening of Union Road from two lanes to five lanes. That was also the year the heating lines broke under the Sanctuary, meaning that the floor had to be cut with a diamond saw and new lines installed. With the heat off in the sanctuary, the congregation returned to their original worship space in the Education Building for about two weeks. Heat was

restored to the sanctuary about a day before the Blizzard of '77!

This experience caused church leadership to realize that we had better raise some serious money for property improvement. A property improvement committee was established; the mortgage was refinanced; and a special fund drive was held. It was at this time that the church began to realize the desperate need for more space.

On October 26, 1980 -- 36 years to the day the Union Road property was purchased -- the church was able to further enhance its worship space by the addition of faceted glass windows that were designed by Dr. Rudolph Sandon of Little Valley, NY. The twelve windows in the Nave represent the twelve disciples and are given as memorials to church members and friends. Three additional memorial windows grace the choir loft and the steps leading to it.

Dedication of a Memorial Garden, located between the two buildings, was held May 16, 1982. This beautiful garden was given in memory of many individuals by members of the congregation.

A new Allen ADC 4000 digital organ was installed in 1984 by James Flood of Poppenberg's Music Store. Through state-of-the-art digital sampling, the new organ duplicates the sound of a 40-rank pipe organ. The dedicatory concert was held March 18, with recitals by Mr.

Flood, the organ builder, and by David Bender, our church organist and choirmaster at the time.

Organists who have served the church through the years have included Joyce Hastings, Joseph Stewart, Lucille Moorman, Mabel Guthrie, Mae Baker, Bruce Ullem, David Bender, James Flood, Brenda Schieber, and our present organist, Charles Johnson.

On October 5, 1986, the congregation witnessed the symbolic burning of the mortgage. For the first time in our history our building was debt-free. This was possible in part because of a gift of \$15,000 from the Williamsville Christian Church which closed its doors in 1976. From 1979, when the money was received, to January 29, 1986, the Trustees wisely invested the money so that the fund had grown to \$36,112, thus making it possible to pay off the indebtedness.

The congregation has continued to place great emphasis on learning about Scripture and promoting spiritual growth. We deliberately reduced the number of business meetings. We increased the number of adult classes during Sunday School and held Bible study during the week. For many years we have been holding an overnight retreat at places like St. Ignatius Renewal Center and Christ the King Seminary.

Our Lenten Series of special Wednesday night services features creative approaches to the Lenten Vigil.

We offer "Kids of the Kingdom" a program for children of the church and neighborhood. Vacation Bible School, offered for a week each summer, reaches more neighborhood children than those related to the church. For several years we have been a site for internships for students from Christ The King Seminary. This relationship has broadened our theological perspective and moved us more into the ecumenical scene.

Nineteen ninety-five marked the 25th anniversary of Rev. Kenneth W. Neal as pastor of the church. It also marked the beginning of the 75th anniversary of the congregation. The "75/25" year was observed with a series of events, including a Homecoming celebration in October, "An Old-Fashioned Christmas" performed by the choir as our Christmas presentation; a "Night at the Movies" in January, featuring films, tapes and slides of events in our church's history; a Lenten Series featuring the Sanctuary windows in which two windows were illuminated and formed the subject of the meditation each Wednesday in Lent; an anniversary presentation of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat".

A special community-wide celebration was held on Anniversary Day, Sept. 29, 1996. The service began with a celebration of the church's past. At the end of the service, everyone moved to the courtyard where ground was broken for a major addition and renovation to the church building.

The newest expansion marked the third major phase of building since the original two-story brick structure

was built on the site in 1946. A contemporary gothic sanctuary was added in 1960. The 1997-98 work included expanded parking, new entrance and atrium area, an elevator, enlarged dining and kitchen facilities, and renovated Christian Education space. Wheelchair accessibility was a chief concern throughout the project. Arthur Frederic Beaman, A.I.A., a member of the congregation, served as architect for the project. Robert Phillips served as chair of the building steering committee.

On September 20, 1998, we dedicated a PEACE POLE added to our garden plot in front of the church. The "May Peace Prevail on Earth" theme drew members and guests to this special addition attractively displaying the theme in four languages: English, Seneca, Hebrew and German. During the dedication the theme was read in these four languages as well as six others: Portuguese, Tagalog, French, Spanish, Polish and Italian.

Charles Johnson and the Cleveland Heights Chancel Choir gave us a most enjoyable 80th Anniversary Concert on March 25, 2001. This musical event was digitally recorded and made into a commemorative CD.

Cleveland Heights also became active in VOICE-Buffalo in 2001. VOICE-Buffalo is a faith based community organization which gets involved with local issues in order to bring about positive change. VOICE believes in promoting citizen participation in Buffalo's spiritual, economic and political life to promote these changes.

The most significant event for Cleveland Heights in 2001 was the retirement of our beloved pastor. The Rev. Dr. Kenneth W. Neal had served as pastor for 31 years. Ken had been a major guiding force for CHCC with his vision and gifts of preaching, teaching and music. He helped to prepare us for his retirement in many ways, including his wonderful sermons. Ken reminded us that Cleveland Heights is called to be the Body of Christ in the World, not a group centered around one person. This is what we have been and must continue to be. Ken's inspiration will live in our congregation years after his retirement.

A retirement dinner was held on September 30, 2001 to honor Ken and his wife Marge. This was a special event was held at the Fairdale Banquet Center to celebrate their years of Christian service at Cleveland Heights.

A Search Committee was formed in 2001 to aid in the pastoral transition process. The committee consisted of: Chairman, Michael Herrold, Susan Grieve, Richard Hemann, Laura Paluch and Judith Deck. After much preparation and interviews with several candidates, the Search Committee recommended Revs. Janice Mahle and James Hakes as interim co-ministers, (who began work at CHCC in October). Jim and Jan brought wonderful gifts of spirituality and humor that were shared with the congregation during Sunday worship or anytime we gathered together. They helped our church remain strong and vital during this difficult time of transition.

In the meantime, the Search Committee continued their task of finding a full-time pastor. During November 20 to 24, 2002 Rev. Frederick Jensen was called for a candidate visit and trial sermon. He was voted by the congregation to be our full-time pastor.

Rev. Jensen moved from Texas into our newly remodeled parsonage in mid-January 2003. Fred is a graduate of Texas Christian University and received his Master of Divinity from Brite Divinity School.

Rev. Jensen was instrumental in having CHCC become a sponsor of a new Disciples of Christ church start, Christ's Salvation Mission at 2205 Genesee St., Buffalo. This sponsorship also led to financial and volunteer support of the TruWay Community center, which ministers to the educational needs of children and adults in the church neighborhood.

Rev. Fred also developed and led the program "A Cup, A Cross, A Country", a cross-continental communion service. This program began at La Hamosa CC in New York City and culminated at the 2005 General Assembly in Portland, Oregon.

In August 2005, Rev. Jensen was released from his contract at CHCC due to differences with the congregation regarding pastoral style and responsibilities.

The Worship Department was assigned the task of selecting an interim pastor to be recommended to the Official Board. After review of several candidates, the Rev. Arthur L. Davis was recommended by Worship and

approved by the Official Board on December 7, 2005. His interim pastorate would begin January 1, 2006.

Rev. Davis is an ordained United Church of Christ minister with dual standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He has served as pastor at the Dedham Congregational Church, UCC in Dedham ME, at Grace UCC on East Delavan Ave., Buffalo, NY and for 19 years as Chaplain at Collins Correctional Facility, Collins, NY, from where he retired nearly 3 years ago.

Cleveland Heights was blessed to have Rev. Davis for our interim pastor and was greatly blessed by the work he did to prepare our congregation for a permanent pastor.

Following selection of our interim pastor, a search committee was approved by the Official Board and charged with the task of finding a full time pastor. The committee members included: Susan Grieve (chair), Mary Susan Dalton, Mark Hemann, Ernest Pleger, and Dianne Serio.

On June 28, 2007 the search committee presented Rev. Nadine A. Schrodt to the Official Board and recommended her to be the full time pastor at CHCC. Following board approval, Rev. Schrodt gave a trial sermon during the Sunday worship service on July 22, 2007 and was voted by the congregation to be our pastor.

On September 1, 2007 Rev. Nadine A. Schrodt began her ministry as the full time pastor at Cleveland Heights

Christian Church. She is married to her husband Roy and has 5 children (3 of whom are currently living at home).

Rev. Schrodt graduated from Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, MO in May 2007, but has a rich history of Christian service prior to graduation. She served as a licensed lay minister at St. John's UCC, in Strykersville, NY for nearly 2 years. She was also a full time Christian educator for a year at First Congregational UCC in Fairport, NY. She had 2 student pastorates in the St. Louis area and worked with BEACON, an interdenominational organization that provides personal assistance through church volunteers and other community resources.