

## A SHORT HISTORY OF UNIVERSITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Nov. 29, 1987

### Chronology

- 1839 City of Austin founded
- 1847 First record of worship service in Austin conducted by “Campbellites”
- 1853 *Christian Evangelist* reports Austin baptism by moonlight in the Colorado River
- 1874 Organization of Christian Women’s Board of Missions
- 1880 James A. Garfield, Disciples of Christ preacher and former president of Hiram College (Ohio), elected President of the United States
- 1881 President Garfield assassinated
- 1882 Building of present Texas Capitol begins
- 1883 Building of University of Texas begins
- 1884 University of Texas classes begin; former Austin City Marshall Ben Thompson killed in San Antonio
- 1893 Christian Women’s Board of Mission found Michigan Bible Chair, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor
- 1897 Virginia Bible Chair, University of Virginia, founded at Charlottesville
- 1901 Kansas Bible Chair, University of Kansas, founded at Lawrence
- 1903 Mrs. M. M. Blanks meets Dr. Herbert L. Willett of the Michigan Bible Chair and Dr. Charles A Young of the Virginia Bible Chair at Chautauqua, N. Y.
- 1904 March Mrs. Blanks invites Professor Wallace C. Payne of the Kansas Bible Chair to spend six weeks in Texas to determine the likelihood of success of a Bible Chair in Texas
- April Mrs. Blanks pledges \$10,000 to CWBM to establish a Bible Chair at the University of Texas
- August Texas Christian Women’s Board of Mission assigns committee to aid establishment of Bible Chair at the University of Texas

- Sept. Professor Payne visits for 12 days and gives 36 “lectures, addresses, and Bible studies” to 960 people including 420 students (total University enrollment: 800 students)
- Professor Payne suggests Frank L. Jewett, minister in Columbus, Kansas, to Mrs. Helen E. Moses, president of the CWBM
- Ben Thompson property purchased
- 1905 May Reverend Frank Jewett visits Austin
- August Reverend Frank Jewett moves to Austin
- Sept. “Life of Christ” offered for credit; 4 students enroll, one for credit
- Classes held in YMCA
- Hyde Park Christian Church founded
- 1909 Texas Bible Chair building built on site of Thompson House with \$20,000 contribution from Mrs. Blanks
- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) celebrates centennial of founding
- 1913 Association of Religious Teachers for University Credit in Bible Courses formed. “...loyal to the truth...” but without “...suspicion of proselytism, denominational advantages, or sectarian advocacy...”
- Courses offered by Texas Bible Chair, Austin Presbyterian Seminary; two professors of the University offer “Religious Education” and “Social Service” (both discontinued in 1914)
- 1915 Paulist Fathers and Jewish Rabbi begin courses
- 1916 Southern Methodists found Wesley Bible Chair
- 1919 Southern Baptists found the John C. Townes Bible Chair
- Church of Christ begins courses
- Board of Regents reconfirms Bible Chair courses
- 1920 United Christian Missionary Society formed; Texas Bible Chair placed under administration of the Department of Religious Education

- 1927 Bible courses offered by Episcopal Church
- 1932 United Christian Missionary Society ceases financial support citing the general economic depression
- Texas Bible Chair Corporation undertakes financial support (until 1942)
- 1942 United Christian Missionary Society resumes responsibility for financial support of Texas Bible Chair
- 1946 Sept. Dr. Jewett retires after 41 years; Dr. Paul G. Wassenich appointed his successor
- Nov. 3 Eleven “founding members” hold the first worship service of the University Christian Church (with Dr. Wassenich as pastor)**
- 1947 Thirty “charter members” formally organize as University Christian Church
- W. W. Sisterton called as minister
- 1948 Lawrence W. Bash called as minister with balance in treasury of 46 cents
- Committee of Forty forms under Chairman Cecil Morgan and assists building fund
- 1949 Bible Chair building expands with 300 seat sanctuary
- 1951 University Christian Church incorporates
- 1953 Church breaks ground for new sanctuary
- 1954 Sanctuary construction complete; capacity of 680; double services conducted each Sunday
- 1958 Charles Cox becomes Director of the Texas Bible Chair
- 1959 United Christian Missionary Society begins property divestment; University Christian church negotiates 99-year lease in exchange for housing and office facilities for Texas Bible Chair in perpetuity
- Construction begins on Education Building, Offices and Chapel
- 1961 Education Building, Office and Chapel dedicated

United Christian Missionary Society transfers title of land to University Christian Church in exchange for trust fund and furnishing of housing and office facilities for Texas Bible Chair in perpetuity

- 1963 Lyndon B. Johnson is the second member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to become President of the United States
- 1960-1970 UCC reflects nationwide decline in church membership
- 1971 University Christian Church celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary
- Special report of Board Committee on Evaluation and Recommendations recommends the Church focus its ministry on the community as well as the University
- 1970-1980 Texas Bible Chair enrollment increases; church membership declines
- 1986 Church records 8000 students participating in activities
- 1987 Chancellor directs University of Texas System components to end credit for Bible courses by spring semester; federal lawsuit filed by Biblical Studies Association; hearing held by Higher Education Committee of the Texas House of Representatives.

## A NOTE CONCERNING “A SHORT HISTORY OF UNIVERSITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH”

The title “A Short History of University Christian Church” denotes a two-part presentation prepared for the Sunday morning Seekers Class of University Christian Church. In preparing the presentation, I sought the advice and counsel of Dr. Ervin Crain, Senior Minister, who allowed me to review the Church’s files containing historical information. Charles Cox, Director of the Texas Bible Chair, granted access to certain of the legal and administrative files of the Texas Bible Chair. Reverend Faye Lee Decker, Associate Minister, recommended publications for additional reading. All three graciously loaned publications from their personal libraries.

The information reviewed in preparing the presentation gave birth to the “Chronology” and “Bibliography” that follow. The “Bibliography” represents only a portion of the material available in the libraries and files of University Christian Church and the Texas Bible Chair, but does contain some standard references and should be a good starting point for anyone wishing to pursue further study.

The administrative files of the Texas Bible Chair and University Christian Church contain valuable sources of information on the history and life of the Bible Chair and Church. The files, well preserved as administrative files, cry out for a knowledgeable archivist to review, catalog, and preserve the material in the administrative files as archival assets.

Such an act of devotion by a volunteer archivist would be a gracious contribution to all the past and present members of the University Christian Church and a rich gift to future members. Preservation of the archives would also be a fitting tribute to the memory of those four of the eleven “Founding Members” of University Christian Church who were devoted librarians. I’m sure the Church and the Texas Bible Chair will welcome the assistance of anyone who has the talent, interest and time for this task.

John T. Muegge  
November 29, 1987

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