

Hope UCC

St. Louis, MO

75 Years and Moving Forward

On June 25, 2019, Hope United Church of Christ will begin a year-long celebration in recognition of its 75-year history in the St. Louis Hills community of St. Louis, Missouri.

On June 25, 1944, 63 persons who had been worshiping together for about six months, formally organized as Hope Evangelical and Reformed Church. The initial group met in the home of one of its group under the leadership of Dr. Purd Dietz of Eden Seminary and Rev. J. E. Kleffman. Later they moved to the home of Rev. Norman Zulauf, organizing minister. As the group grew in size, they utilized space in the portable buildings of Nottingham Public School.

The roles as “Charter Members” were held open until the end of 1944 and a total of 154 Charter Members were recorded. While meeting in the portable school buildings the congregation continued to grow, and on August 29, 1948 ground was broken on the corner of Tamm and Eichelberger for Hope’s church building. This combined Chapel and Educational Building was dedicated in 1950. Almost from the beginning, these new facilities were too small for this growing congregation. By 1952 the Hope congregation had grown to 600 members, with three services held every Sunday. Thoughtful planning with open windows and doors at the back of the Chapel allowed the Narthex and office space to serve as overflow space for well attended services.

In March of 1952 a decision was made to begin planning for expansion. By the summer of 1955 structure started to fill a large excavation adjacent to the initial building. The new building would house the Sanctuary, a large Fellowship Hall and of course a modern kitchen. It would be connected to the original building by a bell tower nearly 90 foot tall. The new building was dedicated on May 5, 1957, and exactly 100 members joined the congregation on that day, bring the membership to 1100.

Some of the significant features of the new sanctuary are its stained glass window and the marble reliefs over the large red entry doors. The main window in the chancel area tells a story of communion, while the balcony window above the main entrance represents baptism. Six windows around the choir transept tells the creation story, and nave windows flank the congregation with stories of the Old Testament on one side and of the New Testament on the other. The reliefs over the main doors depict “The Hand of God” and the “Descending Dove”.

In 1964, after 20 years of service to Hope Church, Pastor Zulauf accepted a call to a church in Florida and Rev. John Trnka and Rev. Donald Mayer were called to serve as Co-Pastors to Hope. Subsequently Hope has been served by Rev. Dennis Lindberg, Rev. Arthur Ellersirck, Rev. Joan Dippel, Rev. Donald Henderson, Rev. Dr. David Mehl, Rev. Dr. Sarah McCann, and

Rev. Ed Zumwinkel. Rev. Dr. Sarah McCann continues to serve Hope Church as pastor to this day.

From Hope's first days there has been a close tie with Eden Seminary. Nearly every year Hope has been a field education site for Eden students. This practice continues today. Hope has also been the home church for many young men and women who chose to follow the ministry as their calling. That list includes Robert and William Morisseau, Don and Mark Shalhut, Glenn Percy, Bruce Breuer, Richard Zulauf, Joan Dipple, Doris Powell and current student Phil Barbier.

For several years the tall bell tower was a beautiful element of the landscape but in 1963 it became the home for a 2200-pound Memorial bell imported from Holland. In 1973 the bell was supplemented with an electronic carillon the filled the neighborhood with inspirational music. A new digital carillon went into service in 2015 ringing the Westminster time pattern during the day.

Hope UCC has a long history of music ministry. In the late 1990s a handbell choir was started under the direction of Jim Threlkeld, who remains the Director of Music Ministries to this day. In 2002, as part of a total reconfiguration of the sanctuary, the Rodgers organ was replaced by a pipe organ from Harrison and Harrison, coming all the way from Durham, England.

Through the first 75 years the interior of the facilities have seen several renovations. In 1973 the chapel was reconfigured to provide space for a significant library at the rear. In the sanctuary the dominant colors were changed to off white and rust. In 1976 the original "ice Bank" air conditioning system was replaced with a continuous service system.

Fellowship and service are key elements in the history and will continue to be so moving forward. The congregation grew in numbers and then slowly declined, reflecting the demographics of the community and society in general. Numerous fellowship groups developed at Hope. Junior High and Senior High Youth Fellowships; Men's Club; Women's Day and Evening Fellowships, Dartball, Athletic Teams for youth and young adults and fellowships groups for young couples, "empty nesters" and seniors in retirement.

History shows that the congregation of Hope has been generous in its support of service organization locally as worldwide. Locally support has been provided for Deaconess Hospital, Unleashing Potential (formerly UCC Neighborhood Houses), Emmaus Home, Eden Seminary, Habitat for Humanity, Isaiah 58, the St. Louis Association of the United Church of Christ and many other programs. Since 1971, the facilities at Hope have served as the home for HopeMark Pre-School. Globally support is given through Our Christian World Mission, the Christmas Fund, the Heifer Project, Church World Service and others.

In 2010, Hope UCC became an Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ, and ministries of welcome, advocacy, and affirming continue through our active Open and Affirming ministry team.

The concluding lines of our statement of welcome and mission are as follows: *“It is our mission, inspired by God’s Holy Spirit, to engage persons in living out the gospel of Jesus Christ. Please come, for all things are ready.”* As we strive to live out our faith in God and the teachings of Christ, we look forward to the next 75 years of Hope UCC.

