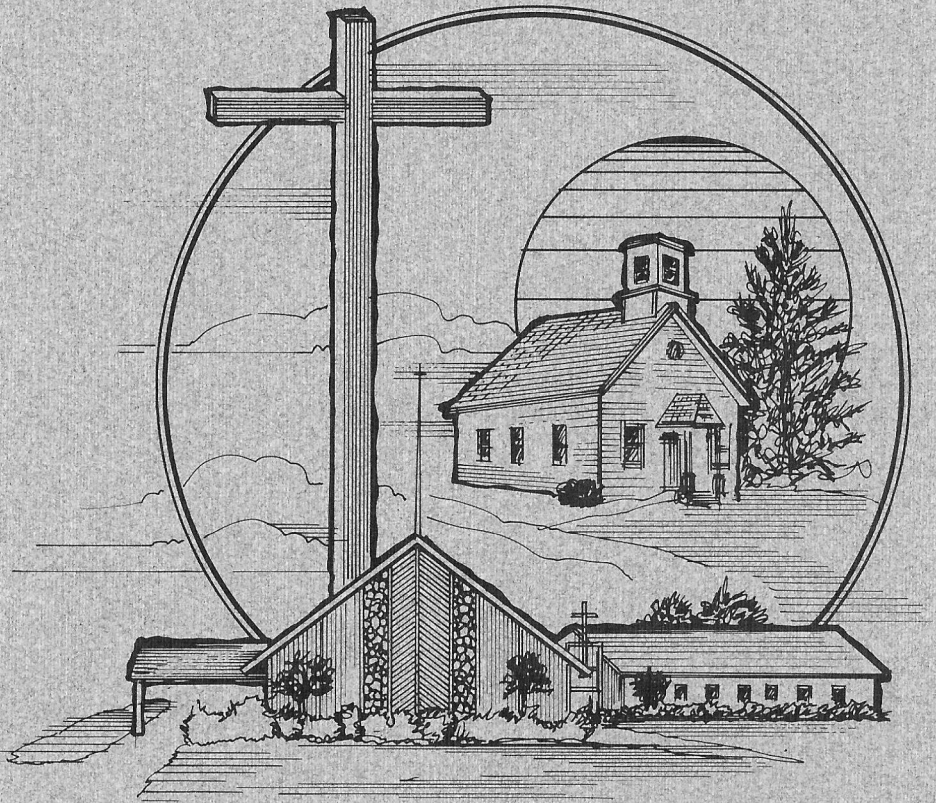


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*History Of*  
**Mt. Zwingli**

“ REFORMED UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST ”

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November 1994

Dear Members,

I did a series of monthly articles in our newsletter in 1976 during our nations Bi-Centennial and I was asked to use the monthly series and update to current time for this 135 Anniversary booklet.

It was difficult not to include many of the events that have taken place at Mt. Zwingli, especially in the last 13 years, but space is limited and therefore I tried to hit just the highlights.

In 1976 as well as now, I used various sources for my information including, books from the public library, a centennial book from Sharon Twp., old letters, newspaper articles and a lot of info from a box of old memorabilia in one of the Church closets.

Although the result may not be professional, I enjoyed doing it and I hope you enjoy reading this simple historical review of our church.

In Christian Love,

Elinor Holshue

## MT. ZWINGLI UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST--HISTORY

The history of Mt. Zwingli UCC goes back a long way--135 years to be exact.

The denominations, which now comprise the UCC, have their roots in England and Europe. A brief review of the early beginnings seems necessary to give an account of how these early influences brought us to where we are today.

Let's go back briefly to Europe and England during the 1500's. The Reformation, sparked by Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox and Ulrich Zwingli, was spreading. Any history book gives details of the persecution suffered by followers of the "New Religions".

Ulrich Zwingli, for whom we think our Church is named, was a Swiss Priest who broke with the Catholic Church and is known as the founder of all Reformed and Presbyterian Churches. Zwingli began his new ministry around 1523 and it spread across Europe. His followers moved from place to place to escape the wrath of local establishments.

The Congregational part of our United Church of Christ mainly evolved from people who disagreed with the Church of England. These people, forming small groups that grew as they wandered through England and Europe, decided that the only way to stop persecution was to go to a new land.

A group left Leyden, Holland in 1620 for America. These were the "Pilgrim Fathers", under the leadership of Brewster, Bradford and Winslow. When they landed at Plymouth, Mass., the Congregational Church had come to America.

The first Reformed groups came to America around 1708. These were mostly German immigrants and the majority settled in Pennsylvania. John Boehm drew up a Constitution for a formal congregation at Falkner Swamp Pa. in 1725 and the Reformed Church was established in America.

The difficulty these early settlers had in worshipping was magnified by the very wilderness they had chosen to live in. Needless to say, lack of communication caused splits in churches and many other denominations were formed while others fused with the Congregational and Reformed Churches.

The comings and goings of the churches are too lengthy to report here, but one thing they all had in common was their desire to worship God as they pleased; so when the Revolutionary War began, many put aside their differences and fought side by side.

The importance of "Freedom of Religion" to our founding fathers is perhaps best explained by the fact that the very first amendment to the Constitution guarantees: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of Religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, etc."

## EARLY LOCAL BEGINNINGS

By the early 1800's, America was just beginning to cut her baby teeth on the wilderness west of Pennsylvania. Back in New England, on April 4, 1807, members of the Connecticut Land Co. decided to distribute among themselves 46 portions of land in the Ohio country. These 46 portions were known as the "Western Reserve" or "Connecticut's White Elephant" to those of lesser vision.

In the 28th draft, Town #2, Range 13, containing 16,139 acres was drawn by Willaim and Richard Hart, Samuel Mather and Gaylord Griswold. Total value of this tract was \$26,087.00. The first name given to the tract was "Hart and Mathers". In 1829 it was changed to "Gash" for a state in Scotland, but a few months later it was again changed to "Sharon", in honor of Sharon, Conn. The dividing and sub-dividing by the owners of the tract took many years and much hard work by the settlers who purchased land. To them this was the "Wild West" and Indians roamed the territory and many tribes joined the British during the War of 1812 because England promised the Indians, "Together we will drive the white men from northern Ohio".

By 1831 many homesteads were established in the tract and formal organization of Sharon Township was enacted. Seventy-five votes were cast, electing township officers. By now the tract had been divided into 80 lots. In and around lot 70 in the southeast section of the township, where our church now stands, the inhabitants were mostly farmers. As their forefathers before them, they brought to the Western Reserve a real and necessary religious spirit and zeal.

To worship though, they had to travel many miles to reach the churches then established. As early as 1842 the Methodist Episcopal Church held meetings in Sharon Center. The Universalist Church was erected in 1851 (now Sharon Town Hall). Earlier than 1850 probably, both Lutheran and German Reformed ministers preached in and around Sharon but in 1858 the two congregations met and joined and were known as the Evangelical Lutheran and German Reformed Church. They held services in the Methodist or Universalist buildings, usually every other week.

We can well imagine the difficulties, present at the time, to travel even several miles to worship. At times, it was probably impossible, and so several residents of the southeast corner of the township got together to discuss the possibility of building their own church.

### A CHURCH IS CREATED

On April 1, 1859, 135 years ago, a Rev. Schlosser, a member of the Sandusky Classes, Ohio Reformed Synod, preached to a group of citizens from around the southeast corner of Sharon who wanted to start their own Church. Just where this meeting was held is a mystery but at a subsequent meeting, Joseph Rhodes and John James were elected elders and Abraham Houghland and Phillip Ream, deacons. Some of these men are buried in our Cemetery.

On Sunday, Dec. 4, 1859, a formal organization of 17 members was affected. "Mt. Zwingli" was chosen as the name of Reformed Congregation at Rhodes Corners (what is now Fixler and Medina Line Rds.)

For the next 10 years services were held but no record can be found of where they were held. We do know that Reverands Schlosser, C.H. Reiter and S.C. Goss served during these 10 years.

In 1869 the first church building was erected where our present block building (Chapel) now stands. Joseph Rhodes gave a portion of his land as a church site. Mrs. Clarence (Alta) Houghland, who was 99 yrs. old at the time she was interviewed in 1976, remembered the original church when she was a small child and young woman. It was a one room wooden structure. The pews had backs with a center aisle dividing the men's side

from the women and children's side. There was an organ and a pulpit on a platform, one step up from the main floor.

In 1909 the church was struck by lightning and completely destroyed by fire. The same year the block building was constructed.

Between 1910 and 1939 several Methodist and at least one Baptist and one United Brethren minister preached at Mt. Zwingli.

From 1921 to 1936 Mt. Zwingli had no connection with the Reformed denomination, but sufficient services were held to maintain its place as one of the oldest Reformed Churches in the Akron area.

In 1936, a lay minister, P.E. Stover, reorganized what was by then The Evangelical and Reformed Church at Mt. Zwingli with 24 members.

From time to time Mt. Zwingli has been affiliated with Reformed Churches in Wadsworth and Loyal Oak. Over 45 ministers, laymen and supply pastors have served since 1859.

In 1952 Synod felt we would be better served by sharing a Pastor with Emanuel Church (High Church) in Doylestown and thus began our 29 year connection with our "Sister Church". The preacher would give his sermon at Mt. Zwingli then journey to Emanuel to preach. Sunday school was held following service at MT. Z and before service at Emanuel.

In the late 1950's Mt. Zwingli members realized a need for a facility for Christian Education and fellowship. Suppers and other fellowship were held in member's homes or at Sharon Town Hall and Sunday School for different ages in a one room church could be distracting. Under the leadership of Rev. Arnold Claiber, plans for a Centennial Hall were begun.

Groundbreaking services were held in May, 1960 and the Cornerstone was laid in July of 1960. Some items placed in the cornerstone are a Revised Standard Bible, a copy of the property deed and Programs of the Centennial Service of 1959.

At great financial sacrifice, Centennial Hall was completed by 1963 and the debt of \$37,000.00 was paid off in 8 years. Before completion of the Hall, Rev. Claiber left for a call to Sugar Creek and an interim pastor, Rev. Clarence Pike and a new pastor, Rev. Arthur Gerhold led the completion of the project.

We grew slowly but surely for several years as more and more farmland surrounding us turned into allotments and suburban tracts. During these years interim/supply pastors, Rev. Clarence Pike and Rev. Rubin Schroer preached between regular pastors, Rev. Roger Kvam and Rev. Daryl Higgins.

A turning point came, when in 1975, we called Rev. Eddie Bray to the yoked Mt. Zwingli and Emanuel Churches. He was a trustee for the U.C.C. Ohio Conference and he knew of an upcoming program to revitalize old, existing churches and to begin new ones.

Upon seeing the growth and vitality at Mt. Zwingli, Rev. Bray and the congregation did a lot of study and soul searching and decided to apply to the program, New Initiatives in Church Development (NICD). This program could help us financially to realize our dream of a full time pastor of our own and a new church on empty land we owned by Centennial Hall.

In 1981, the Board for Homeland Ministries and NICD of the United Church of Christ, approved our application and the search for our first full time pastor in 122 years began.

After a lengthy search, we learned that Rev. Gerald Baker was returning from Florida to Ohio and we read his resume and called him.

He accepted our call and the challenge and on Sept. 1, 1981, Rev. Baker became our first full time Pastor.

We quickly found that we were outgrowing the block church. At one service we had 155 worshipers in a building built to hold 80 in the pews.

At the Jan., 1982 Congregational meeting we voted to begin planning for a new church. With local financial support increasing, help from NICD and Rev. Baker to guide us, we embarked on a whirlwind year of building plan studies, cost estimates, etc.

By Jan. of 1983 we were ready. A building fund drive netted us \$77,000.00 given or pledged. Private gifts elevated the total to \$90,000.00. On July 14, 1983 we held our Groundbreaking Ceremony. On Nov. 23, 1983, Thanksgiving Eve, we held our first service with 287 people from our Church and other Sharon Twp. Churches present. The building was not completely finished and

we had to sit on folding chairs as the pews had not arrived, but we had much to be Thankful for and pleased to share it with the community.

Our 125th Anniversary year was in 1984 and on Feb. 23, 1984 we dedicated our new Church building to its place among the UCC Eastern Ohio Association, The Ohio Conference, The National UCC and to God. On Dec. 2, 1984, our last celebration date of our 125th year, with our first full time Pastor and our new Church. A special part of this celebration was ringing 125 times the old Chapel bell, in its new location next to the new sanctuary. On that day we also placed several items into a Time Capsule under the new bell cradle so future generations will have a record of our amazing story.

After 5 years of financial aid (in the amount of \$66,000.00 from NICD), in Aug. of 1986, we were healthfully on our own financially. To maintain ourselves, there have been countless hours of dedicated service by the membership, including putting on bazaars, dinners, and auctions as well as regular pledging and giving.

Our goal from the beginning has been to pay off the mortgage in the allotted time and there is not enough space to tell of all the work and dedication it took, but on May 15, 1994 we burned the mortgage on the remaining debt.

On Oct. 2, 1994 our guiding Pastor through the last 13 years of building and growing, Rev. Gerald Baker, retired. He and his wife Rachel remain members of our Church.

Our interim minister, Rev. Milton Ellis, leads us on while we search for a new fulltime minister. "May God continue to guide us."

From the days of Zwingli, Luther and the Reformation through the birth of our Country and it's hectic childhood, we see how our Church was begun 135 years ago; through the hopes and prayers of people like us, who wanted a Church of their own, made a lot of sacrifices and used a lot of elbow grease to get it. "We could do no less."

### MT. ZWINGLI CEMETERY HISTORY

In March of 1886, Adam Halderman and his wife sold to Mt. Zwingli Church, land for the cemetery for the consideration of \$75.00. This land surrounded the Church and had been used for burial grounds for many years. Some of those buried there are; John Horgland, 1839; Mrs. Sam Porter, 1841; Mrs. Wm. Porter, 1848; David Thomas, 1850.

A Cemetery Association was founded in 1917 by some local women for the purpose of maintaining the grounds. The By-Laws stated that only women could hold office and vote and that men could only be honorary members. During lean years for the church, the Association and Ladies Aid helped the Church financially and did needed repairs and painting on the building.

Around 1921, the first Ice Cream Social was held to help fund the Cemetery Association. In 1931, an entry in the annual meeting minutes recalls that the Association sold 16 quarts of cherries from the Cemetery tree for 5 cents a quart.

For a number of years the Cemetery was managed by a Board of Trustees separate from the church, but in recent years Mt. Zwingli assumed responsibility under the Cemetery Committee for the upkeep and care of the grounds. More land was purchased from neighbors a few years ago to increase the Cemetery to the west of the original section.

### A FEW INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT MT. ZWINGLI AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

The first settlers in southeast Sharon Twp. were a Mr. Hower and his wife. They later moved to Akron where he founded and operated Hower Mill, also known as Old Stone Mill and Quaker Oats Mill.

In 1887 a school was built on the J. Miller farm, just north of the corner of Koontz and S. Medina Line Rds. Mr. Clarence Hougland, a member of Mt. Zwingli, taught there at 18 years of age.

Rev. Goss, who preached at Mt. Zwingli intermittently between 1867 and 1885, didn't like smoking. He told the congregation to leave their smokes out side -- "Even the dogs won't touch them".

The Women's Guild was formed in Dec. of 1949 and was active for a few years then declined for lack of interest. Rev. J.T. Bucher, preacher at that time, helped reorganize it in 1954.

Membership grew from 112 members in 1981 to 299 members in 1994.

## THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

In 1859 we became Mt. Zwingli Reformed Church.

In 1934 we became MT. Zwingli Evangelical and Reformed Church because of a merger of these two denominations. There was much in common between the two. Both originated in Germany, both shared Reformed traditions and both were committed to cooperation and Christian fellowship with other denominations.

Even earlier, in 1931, the Congregationalists and Christian Churches had united. Both origins could be traced to England and their beliefs and practices were so similar it seemed a natural thing to do.

As time went on the union of these denominations became feasible. More and more ministers and laymen acknowledged the wisdom of having Christians organized on a regional and national basis and committed to a common program.

Although the Congregational Christians believed in strong control by the local church, the Evangelical and Reformed churches used the Presbyterian type of government which gives considerable power to the Synods. These differences are eased by the fact that both groups have a high regard for Congregational freedom and fellowship of Churches.

Informal talks from 1941 until 1948, between denominations ironed out the conflicts and a Basis of Union was adopted. In Cleveland, Ohio in 1957, the Union took place and a constitution was adopted in 1961 in Philadelphia, Pa. Thus began the United Church of Christ.