

The Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church

A schism occurred in the Sommerfelder Church in 1936 when on November 17 at an organizational meeting in the village of Rudnerweide a motion was passed to elect an elder who would head the new church. This election of Elder W. H. Falk took place in the church at Rudnerweide on January 8, 1937. The ordination of Rev. Falk as Elder of the new congregation followed on February 4, that same year, and the name of the young church was to be Rudnerweider Mennonite Church. In 1959, the name was changed to Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church.⁸

When the Bergthaler Church building at the village of Hoffnungsfeld was divided between two congregations, one-half of it was moved to Glencross and the other half to Rosenbach about a mile north of Winkler. The late Mr. Jacob Peters, father of Rev. W. J. Peters, was one of the carpenters who sawed the church building at Hoffnungsfeld in two. The half of the church that was moved to Rosenbach village was completed, and used by the Sommerfelder Church until 1937 when the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church at Rosenbach was organized. In 1942 the church building at Rosenbach was moved into Winkler onto a lot on the west side of Third Street about one-half a block north of Pembina Avenue. This building was replaced by a new church erected in 1953 at 186 Third Street.

There were about twenty members attending when the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church was organized in Rosenbach. The first ministers were the late Rev. Gerhard J. Froese and Rev. Isaac P. F. Friesen who for many years served the E.M.M.C. congregation at Winkler as leader. For a number of years Rev. A. M. Friesen was the leader of the church. He had been ordained for the ministry on October 3, 1943. Other ministers who have been active in the Church here are David Hildebrand, Jerry Hildebrand, David Funk, and Frank Zacharias. Rev. Ben D. Wiebe, B.A., Th.B., who has been on the Garden Valley Collegiate Institute staff since September 1, 1968, was ordained in July, 1965, and has served as leader of the Winkler E.M.M.C. since March 23, 1969.

Rev. Gerhard J. Froese who was born at Schoenfeld near Winkler on August 29, 1901, grew up on the parental farm in the village of Reinfeld two miles east of town. Here he spent his childhood and youth and attended the village private school where the Bible constituted the main text book and reader. On June 12, 1923, he was baptized by Elder Peter Toews and accepted into the membership of the Sommerfelder Church. This was followed by his ordination for the ministry on November 15, 1931. When Rev. Isaac P. Friesen of Rosthern, Saskatchewan, was conducting evangelistic services in the village of Reinfeld, in 1934, Rev. Froese experienced a thorough revival so that when the Rudnerweider Church was organized in 1936, he became one of its most zealous ministers.

The life of Rev. Froese was suddenly snuffed out in a railway accident at Horndean, Manitoba, on December 5, 1947. It was while he was a passenger in a car driven by his son that they approached the railroad crossing just ahead of the train on the C.P.R. tracks. When Rev.

Froese feared a collision, he opened the front door of the automobile and jumped out and landed right on the tracks before the oncoming train. None of the other passengers were injured as the car cleared the tracks before the train struck. Two of his sons, Rev. Jake Froese, Winnipeg, and Rev. John G. Froese, Altona, have followed their father into the E.M.M.C. ministry.

A close associate of Rev. Gerhard J. Froese, was Rev. I. P. F. Friesen who grew up in the same village and was a childhood friend and comrade of the former. Rev. Friesen was ordained for the ministry on June 23, 1937, and was an ardent witness in the young Church. For almost twenty years he was the leader of the Winkler E.M.M.C. However, he operated a farm two miles north of town in order to support his family.

The zeal of the two youthful converts, Rev. Froese and Rev. Friesen, took them to the Mennonite villages of Saskatchewan on several occasions where their witness bore much fruit. Their most effective work was done at Hague, Hochfeld, and Chortiz in Northern Saskatchewan. As a result of their evangelistic services, churches were established and God's children were edified. Rev. I. P. F. Friesen has also been conducting revival meetings in Mexico and in British Honduras.

The Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church has also fostered the spirit of missions at home and abroad and the local members who have gone out as missionaries include Mr. and Mrs. Bert Brown. They have been serving with the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission at Weagamow Lake, Ontario, as well as in other areas. When Bert was a high school student at Winkler Collegiate he walked a distance of four and one-half miles to school every day, or a total of nine miles on a return trip. This outdoor exercise together with his love for nature has prepared him well for the life of a northern missionary.

Rev. Jerry Hildebrand, who was ordained in 1955, and Mrs. Hildebrand who are members of the Winkler E.M.M.C., are serving under the West Indies Mission at Sao Leopoldo, Brazil. Before leaving for the foreign mission field, Rev. Hildebrand taught in public school, as well as at the Winkler Bible Institute while on furlough. Together with their family, the Hildebrands are now serving their third term in the sub-continent.

Another couple with their family, Rev. and Mrs. Frank Zacharias, have served in Paraguay, and are now stationed in British Honduras. Before leaving for South America, Rev. Zacharias was a member of the teaching staff at Garden Valley Collegiate Institute in Winkler. Mrs. Zacharias was formerly employed as a public school teacher.

The Sunday School was organized at Rosenbach under the direction of Rev. A. M. Friesen. Miss Tina Dyck, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Julius Dyck, was the first Sunday School teacher. Because of the difficulties experienced with the introduction of the Sunday School and the Young People's Meetings at Rosenbach, these two organizations were not introduced immediately after the Church had been moved to Winkler. However, through the efforts of Frank Krahn, J. W. Harder, and Frank Rempel, these two arms of the Church were soon