

# Celebration Church

*A Center for Life, Hope, & Healing*



1950-2020

70 Years of History

## An Evangelist Returns Home



In 1950, Rev. Richard Dobbins (1927-2014), who had been serving as a traveling evangelist, began to feel God calling him to start a church in his hometown of Akron, Ohio. He began in 1950 by meeting in homes with a group of people for Bible study to explore this possibility of a new church. During the Bible studies Rev. Benedict, Pastor of the First Hungarian Assembly of God on Yale Street, offered Dobbins' group the use of their building on Sunday afternoons and evenings. They met there for six months.

Rev. F.E. Whipkey, an ordained Assemblies of God minister, owned a church on South Street in Akron known as South Akron Pentecostal Church (57 West South Street). Whipkey suggested since he had the church building, but no people, and Dobbins had the people, the group should meet in his building on South Street.

The group met for two years on Wednesday night for Bible study at South Street. They enjoyed God's blessings and experienced growth. During this two-year period, Dobbins continued to serve as a traveling evangelist. In 1952, the group began to hold Sunday services as well. (NOTE: The church currently owns the cornerstone of this building. It is located in the church offices.) That first July Sunday only 29 children and adults attended Sunday school, but the Lord was there and the church grew. After time, the church affiliated with the General Council of the Assemblies of God, and became known as The South Akron Assembly of God.



The group which became known as the South Akron Assembly of God (AKA Glad Tidings Assembly of God) was able to purchase the property from Whipkey for \$7,000. God blessed the small church on South Street. People were being saved, baptized in the Holy Spirit, and healed. The church later sold the building to the City of Akron for \$35,000 to make room for the west leg of the Akron freeway.

Longtime member, Jim Snodgrass recounts a personal experience with the Lord. In late 1951, he and his wife Lourena began to attend the church on South Street. Jim said,

*On Easter Sunday in 1952, we had an all-day singin' and dinner on the grounds. It seemed like the quartets were singing directly to me. That night Pastor Dobbins was preaching hell, fire and brimstone in the evening evangelistic service. When the altar was opened for salvation, I did not*

*wait. When I got to the altar, the Holy Spirit hit me and I went down under His power! Before I got back on my feet, I had found Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, and I have never looked back.*

Jim Snodgrass served faithfully as a Trustee and Deacon. He served as a Sunday School teacher and prayer warrior. Jim was the number one handyman for many years.

People who were a part of the group that began meeting on South Street with Pastor and Dolores Dobbins included the Bill and Hassie Turner family, the Bernie and Elizabeth Emerson family, the Granville and Pearl Uphole family, the Bob and Dorothy Gibson family, the Albert and Mildred Bittinger family, and Martin and Lena Chilton and their son Fred (who became the first youth pastor). Others from those early years included Bob and Wilma Keifer, Floyd and Emma Felter, Shelva Felter (Ellington), Ed and Una Green, the first church pianist Mary Jane (Miller) Dereberger, W.W. and Leila Dobbins, the Dickerson family, and Kenneth Ivey.

In 1956, a significant healing occurred at the South Street church. Bob and Dorothy Gibson learned in July 1955 that their second child, Marilyn (Gibson) Parker had Spinal Polio. Marilyn at age 11 months was not able to use her right arm. Her deltoid muscle in her right arm was 78% paralyzed. She could not lift her arm to come forward and was unable to feed herself. The attending physician, Dr. Krill, advised the family that the child would never be able to use her arm and he fitted her with a brace. Marilyn was being treated at Akron Children's Hospital and the story about her battle with polio was documented in a feature story in the Roto Magazine section of the *Akron Beacon Journal* on November 6, 1955.

On the first Sunday of February in 1956, Dorothy began to sense God wanted to do something special for Marilyn. She told Bob she thought they needed to take Marilyn forward for prayer when Pastor Dobbins opened the altar time for those needing healing. Pastor Dobbins prayed for Marilyn and nothing happened...until two days later. On Tuesday morning, Marilyn, now 17 months, was sitting in her highchair waiting to be fed. She miraculously raised her right arm and began to feed herself. Marilyn was healed!

In 1958 a new church was born—the Assembly of God at Brown and Vine. The church known as Bethel Assembly of God at the corner of Fourth Avenue and Chittenden Street, later became known as Central Assembly of God (because of its location), and Dobbins' church of South Akron Assembly of God (AKA Glad Tidings Assembly of God) merged. Bethel Assembly of God was without a pastor when Rev. Roy Armstrong resigned. The board from Bethel Assembly of God, known as Central Assembly of God at the time, approached Rev. Richard Dobbins about the possibility of merging the South Akron Assembly of God (Glad Tidings Assembly of God) with Central Assembly of God. After much prayer, discussions, and deliberations the two congregations decided to merge. The meetings were held at the location of Brown and Vine Streets which was owned by Central Assembly of God. The first service as a united church was October 4, 1958, at 315 Brown Street, Akron, Ohio. The new congregation was officially called The Assemblies of God, Inc. or the Assembly of God at Brown and Vine.

Some of the families who came out of the Central Assembly into the new merged church include: the Arnold family, the Aronholt family, the George and Goldie Seiber family (George was a long-time deacon and elder prior to his death), the Sherman and Myrtle Cummings family (Sherm was a long-time deacon and elder prior to his death), the Christian (Chris) Becker family (Chris was the custodian

and church treasurer for many years prior to his death), the Thompson family, Arnold (brother) and Edith (sister) Harshamn, the Ralph and Marie Gartland family, Sister Ferris and her children that included Moneira (Carnes) and Katie (Troxell), the Isaac Miller family, which included children Mary Bea (Mrs. George Sponseller), Dorothy K. Miller of Wadsworth, Jack Miller, Perry Miller and Mrs. Betty E. Miller Sarver, the Howard family whose son Roger became Mayor of Stow, the Channels family whose daughter Estel married Charles Bender (Estel was a faithful children's worker for many years), the Knox family, Hazel Timmons, Charles Bower, Donna (Burt) Ebie, the Enos Doughty family, the W.D. Burt family, and the E.A. Burt family. Both Enos Doughty and W.D. Burt served faithfully on the Deacon Board.

The merged church at Brown and Vine experienced rapid growth. The Sunday School had to use the old Spicer School building for additional space. Eventually a rental property at 395 Vine St had to be acquired to accommodate another department of the Sunday school, the printing facilities, and the Assistant Pastor's office. Many people were being saved, healed, and filled with the Holy Spirit. By 1961, it became obvious that larger facilities were needed for the congregation. Every member of the congregation was urged to look for plots of four acres of ground or more near a major traffic artery. Plans began to find a new location and to build. Property the church had bought earlier at the corner of East Avenue and Morse Road was considered. The property that won consideration for the building committee, however, was at 688 Dan Street in Akron, and 6.5 acres of property was purchased for \$65,000.

The City of Akron was not readily willing to issue a building permit for the church to build at this location. The city coveted this property as being in the path of the InnerBelt Freeway they wanted to build. In addition to this, they wanted the gravel from the property to use in building the freeway. After much prayer and many negotiating meetings, God moved upon the city planners to issue a permit to build at the Dan Street location.

The building permit included many unusual stipulations that the city hoped would discourage the church from moving forward with the construction. The most obvious stipulation was the requirement to include the very large parking lot which is in front of the Dan Street building.

On August 9, 1964, the congregation broke ground and began construction on a new building. Immediately following Sunday School, a parade of over 100 cars led by Mayor Edward O. Erickson and City Councilman Joseph Costello made its way from Brown and Vine Streets to the new location. More than 200 people were on hand for the groundbreaking ceremonies. Roe Messner and Company was contracted to do the architecture and to construct the building. On November 28, 1965, this growing congregation moved into its new facility on Dan Street. The new congregation became known as Evangel Temple in February 1967. The building was dedicated on May 2, 1966, with Rev. C.M. Ward, the Revivaltime speaker, as the dedication speaker. His father, A.G. Ward was one of the early founders of the Pentecostal movement.

The new building at Dan Street housed a suite of offices and classrooms for children of elementary school age. The classrooms were equipped with instruction centers which provided the teaching team with a blackboard, corkboard, and flannelboard. All major rooms were equipped with outlets for closed

circuit television. Upstairs you would find the church library with research and reading materials for any worker, teacher, or member of Evangel Temple. In the control room, the latest in lighting and sound equipment were used. The sound system was equipped to carry three separate audio



programs to any combination of three preselected areas in the building. FM programming was also available. The sanctuary accommodated over 900 people, none of whom is further than sixty feet from the speaker. Space was built into the sanctuary for two television cameras and added lighting necessary for a television ministry. The prayer chapel was located below the sanctuary and was filled with people of all ages praying and finding God's power. Every week *Evangel News* was mailed to 3,000 homes in the local area and around the country. The news was produced in Evangel's printing room and sent out through the use of addressograph equipment. It was known that the "missionary ministry of Evangel Temple takes the message of the gospel to many other parts of the world." Services at the new building were as follows: Sunday School 10am, Worship 11am, Sunday night 7:00pm, and Wednesday family night at 7:30pm.



In 1970, Dobbins received his doctorate in guidance and counseling from the University of Akron. In 1972, Dobbins founded Emerge Ministries at the Evangel Temple location. In 1973, Emerge moved out of Evangel Temple and into the Byrden Building in Akron. In 1987, Emerge Ministries relocated to its Mull Avenue location. The vision for Emerge began out of painful circumstances in the lives of Rev. and Mrs. Dobbins. Following the birth of their first child, Dolores was overcome with post-partum depression. Not finding the Biblical help they desperately needed, Rev. Dobbins began his search to help them find understanding and healing. Thankfully, Dolores did receive her healing, and out of this painful process, Dobbins began to understand how the Bible offers sound solutions and wise counsel regarding the complex emotional

needs of people. God directed Dobbins to not only pursue a counseling degree but to also begin a counseling ministry at the church. By 1976 Emerge had grown to the point that Dr. Dobbins felt it was time to resign as pastor so that he could devote his full efforts to this blossoming ministry.

Rev. Derrill R. Sharp who was on staff at Emerge succeeded Dr. Dobbins as Pastor at Evangel Temple. He served faithfully for twenty years. During his tenure the church benefited from his sound fiscal leadership. He brought financial stability that helped the church through difficult times. He also led the church successfully through the *Doors of Love* building campaign in 1988. The foyer, second floor, additional classrooms and restrooms were added. A major renovation of the sanctuary and educational wing were also part of this \$650,000 project. Sharp also brought a new season of ministry to the church through the church's Montessori school. Because of his passion for missions, the church's annual missions budget grew substantially. Evangel Temple ranked in the top two percent of all Assembly of God churches in the U.S. in missions giving. Included in this outreach was Royal Family

Kids Camp that began in his final year as pastor. This camp cared for children of abuse and neglect in Summit County.

Rev. Michael Mancari succeeded Pastor Sharp in January 1997. He had served with Sharp for 11.5 years. When Mancari joined the staff in 1985, little did he know he would still be serving fifteen years later. Pastor Mancari prior to serving as senior pastor, served as both the children's and the associate pastor. Under his leadership Royal Family Kids Camp flourished and Celebrate Recovery was launched. *Celebration Church's* Celebrate Recovery program was well known in the community and ministered to many. Mancari led the congregation until 2002, at which time Rev. Jeff Wade became pastor.

Under Rev. Wade's leadership, updates were made to the church facility, multiple outreach programs were launched, the church partnered with a community organization to build a playground for children. An outreach called *Free Church Weddings* was organized under Wade's leadership, and gained national news media attention for providing free weddings to couples in need. Couples would receive free wedding dresses, wedding décor, wedding ceremony, fittings, and more. Wade's leadership also cultivated the arts through an outreach program called *Celebration Players*, in which the congregation performed various theatrical presentations in partnership with North High School. Pastor Wade at the end of the presentation would share a Gospel message. In May 2005, the church's name was changed from Evangel Temple to Celebration Church. Wade resigned in 2013, and relocated to Ocala, Florida. Pastor John Palmer, former Assemblies of God General Secretary, provided interim pastoral support for nearly a year during the search for a new pastor.

In July of 2014, Celebration Church welcomed new Pastors, Zach and Heather Prosser. The Prossers have led the church through a transition of revived vision and purpose. The church began in 2015 *Night of Hope*, a humanitarian outreach expressing the love of Christ through compassion ministries. Through *Night of Hope* over 130,000 meals have been served, hundreds of haircuts given, medical screenings performed, thousands of pounds of clothing distributed, and much more. The outreach has gained notoriety and its model used in other churches in the country. Under the Prosser's leadership, many have been born again, baptized in the Holy Spirit, healed, delivered, been water baptized, and have engaged in ministry. Other outreaches in the community include the annual Easter Egg outreach, back to school outreach, *The Hope Center*, Biblical counseling services, and many more. The church also launched *Bethesda Training Center* in 2015, providing church members and community members an opportunity for sound, Spirit-filled perspective, Biblical collegiate level Bible and ministry training. Through this and other outreaches, the church has provided training and support to the refugee community and refugee pastors. One of the earmarks of the Prosser's ministry has been the tangible glory of God in the church and its unique expression among the congregation through community, evangelism, Spirit-led worship, and unique manifestations of God's presence in services. Many stories of personal God-experiences have been shared about the tangible sense of God's love, people driving from the freeway into the parking lot by an unknown force, healings, salvations, and much more. In services testimonies have been shared of deaf ears opening, broken limbs being restored, leg paralysis being healed, strength being restored, deliverance from demons, among others. Water baptisms have been characterized by supernatural demonstrations of power and deliverance, with many being carried or assisted out of the baptismal overwhelmed by the power of God. Supernatural joy has been demonstrated spontaneously among the congregation regularly. Intentional discipleship and leadership development opportunities have been provided under the Prosser's leadership, with many

stepping into ministry leadership and helps ministry with nearly 90 percent of the church's participants serving in ministry.