

THE WISCONSIN DISTRICT OF THE WESLEYAN CHURCH

A History
1867-1917

“Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations” (Deut. 32:7).

Wesleyan Methodists were identified as such more than twenty years before the Wisconsin Conference was organized. Prior to 1845, they were joined with the Iowa Conference, but in October 1845, they formed the Wisconsin Conference. By 1848, there were 8 elders, 10 licentiates, and 268 lay members. Further growth brought a division into two Conferences in 1860-- West Wisconsin Conference consisting of those churches south of Wisconsin Rapids, and the Wisconsin Conference, encompassing all other Wisconsin Churches.

Rev. George Peglar, who had emigrated from New York to Wisconsin was well acquainted with the work in Wisconsin. In his autobiography, he wrote,

“In 1864...our churches were considerably weakened by some of our members going down to the front as volunteers; and about this time the so-called union movement commenced, and most of the preachers and many of the members of the Wisconsin Conference left us to find homes more congenial to their views.”

The General Conference of 1867 authorized the uniting of the two Conferences, and it was done in the following year, October 15-17, 1868, in Lindina (a community about 4 miles south of Mauston, Wisconsin). By 1879, there were 28 churches and 16 Sunday Schools.

During most of these early years, the Conference Presidents were expected to keep up a church as well as travel the Conference. However, in 1896, the Conference voted that the President spend all his time visiting churches. This plan was followed until 1903 when he was assigned to the Ironton Circuit. Then, in 1913 and 1914, he once again enjoyed full time as Conference President.

In 1911, the Conference voted to require the pastors to visit among their churches two days a week. At this time, most pastors were responsible for two or three churches on their circuit and travel was by horse and buggy or by horseback. Many of them also farmed to support their families.

Typical of such a pastor was Rev. Albert Shore, a farmer/preacher. He traveled as far as 30 miles from his farm in Valton to preach in his church circuit every weekend. When he pastored Peck's Corners near Cashton, he would start Saturday morning from his home, driving his horse and buggy to his preaching point. When he reached the Burr Ridge area, he served four churches-- Burr, Valley, Oak Ridge, and Billings Creek (now Mt. Pisgah). He also pioneered the church at Trippville, all this on a salary of about \$100 per year.

The center of the Wesleyan work in those years was at Bethel, near Ironton, Wisconsin. During those years, a thriving Wesleyan Church having as many as 85 members was located next to the campgrounds where a large camp meeting was held annually. From that church came John and Elizabeth Ayres, missionaries to Africa, and John Ayres, Jr., professor at Miltonvale Wesleyan College. Its yearly meeting minutes record that this church gave up members on two different occasions when they helped start new churches.

1917-1967

In 1919 and 1920 the Conference gave permission to sell the Jacksonville Church property (near Tomah) and in 1923, a permanent campground was purchased at Burr Ridge. A new Tabernacle was built and ready for use by the Conference in 1925.

Statistics in 1927 show that there were 27 pastors, 13 serving full time. There were 21 preaching points and 20 churches. There were 14 church buildings, seven parsonages, and 515 members.

In 1930, special emphasis began on youth ministry with \$50 set aside for a “boys and girls” convention at Burr Camp. Thus began the official organization of the Wisconsin Conference youth work.

Between 1928 and 1934, five churches were started. A church was also started in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1930 and organized in 1936. Three years later, it was transferred to the Iowa Conference.

In 1942, the Wisconsin Conference was incorporated.

Because of shifting population and economic changes, many small town and rural churches had closed, so there began a new focus on establishing churches in the state's metropolitan areas. Central Wisconsin added several churches as well, and the Conference also established a church in Anchorage, Alaska.

1967-2017

During this fifty-year period, emphasis focused on four areas-- Burr Camp ministry, strengthening the churches/pastors, church planting, and missions.

Over the first 30 years, the Burr Camp ministries included a Spring work-week, Southern Children's Camp, District Wesleyan Youth Camp, District Conference/Family Camp, and the Couple's Retreat. While the Camp had a solid core of supporters and an active ministry for nearly 75 years, cultural changes and ministry styles were changing and the newer generations were not as involved nor as enamored with the Camp ministry. As a result, Burr Camp loans and local church loans from the District were negotiated, re-negotiated and/or renewed with little or no progress made at repayment except through the sale of other properties. Burr Camp continued to struggle financially and efforts were made to decrease the debt with little success. With elevating operational costs, declining attendance and support, the Burr Camp was becoming a distraction from other crucial District ministries. Through a study committee, it was determined that modernizing the Camp was a financial impossibility. Finally, in 2001, after significant prayer, study and effort to save the Camp, the decision was made to discontinue the use of the Burr Wesleyan Camp and to sell the property.

During this time, District efforts were made to strengthen the District numerically and financially. District finances were a major concern as many churches remained delinquent in paying District assessments. The District Superintendent, along with the DBA, made significant efforts to turn this around. Local church growth emphasis was on “small group” development and several District initiatives promoted this growth concept with some limited success. In addition, accountability groups were established under the guise of the Leadership Development Journey with the District pastors realizing the need for peer-mentoring and encouragement.

As the churches grew numerically and as two successful church plants (Our Savior's at Mukwonago

and Sand Lake at Onalaska) helped the District gain momentum, and the vision for church planting gained priority. Through these years, several committees were established to review church planting options and attempts were made in various areas-- Hudson/Prescott, Fox River Valley, Racine/Kenosha, Middleton/Northwest Madison, Milwaukee Metro area, etc. Local Church growth and raising financial support in the local church continued to be highlighted with several initiatives through District and Zone meetings.

In 2000, through an anonymous financial gift, the vision for outreach was expanded to foreign missions. While the District had long supported specific missionaries and mission efforts throughout the world, a study team of eight District representatives went to Nicaragua to determine the feasibility of establishing a Wesleyan presence there. Upon their return, and with their enthusiasm for the project, the District authorized the Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partnership consisting of representatives from the Wisconsin District, missionaries to Central America, and Global Partners. Fifteen years later, after an investment of about \$ 1,000,000, and 60+ missions trips for pastoral training, teacher training, building projects and medical ministries, (and many more people praying), the ministry in Nicaragua has matured to a self-directing ministry with sixteen churches, several other preaching points, and four Christian schools. Involvement from Wisconsin now continues at the request of the Nicaraguan junta.

At the time of this writing, there are 28 churches in the District-- 25 Anglo, two Hispanic, one Myanmar, with Church Planting/Re-structuring projects in several other Wisconsin communities. In addition, a Wisconsin/Uganda Partnership has been formed with our first ministry team having gone in January of 2017.

During this 150 years of ministry, a large number of pastors, missionaries and Christian laymen; born, raised and converted at our church altars throughout the District, have gone out to serve the church around the world. Complete records are not available nor could any attempt be made to determine the totality of the impact that the Wisconsin District has had on the growth and expansion of the Kingdom of God. Our vision continues to drive us: healthy leaders, healthy churches, new churches in Wisconsin, and new churches/Districts throughout the world.

Suffice it to say that we give all praise and glory to God as we celebrate 150 years of ministry in Wisconsin and beyond, believing that the best is yet to come!

Church Listings

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1860 Bad Ax
Burr
Little Baraboo
Lemonweir Station
Lindina
North Bad Ax
Eau Claire
Kickapoo
Jacksonville</p> <p>1861 Ironton
Ontario
Buffalo</p> <p>1867 Lemonweir
Tomah
Mt. Tabor
DeSoto
Garden Valley
Pole Grove
Kildare
Oaks (Sauk County)
Lincoln (Mission work)</p> <p>1867 (Merging Conference)
Woodland (Sauk County)
Menominee (Dunn County)
Trempealeau
Oakfield (Fond du Lac County)
Lyons (Sauk County)
Waupun
Oshkosh
Pleasant Ridge</p> <p>1900 Spring Branch (Adams County)
Waupun (closed)
Eau Claire (closed)
Byron (closed)</p> <p>1911 Stone Lake</p> <p>1916 Stanberry</p> <p>1917 Webb Lake
Gull Lake</p> | <p>1919 Jacksonville (closed)</p> <p>1922 Chittamo
Dunnville (Dunn County)</p> <p>1925 Beulah
Eau Claire
Mill Creek
Hayward
Waupaca (closed)</p> <p>1928-1934 Ridgeland
Rice Lake
Spooner
Hillsboro
Rockbridge</p> <p>1936 Minneapolis, Minnesota
Oshkosh (Mission)</p> <p>1937 Seldon (Now Darrow Road)</p> <p>1938 Appleton</p> <p>1939 Minneapolis, Minnesota (transferred to Iowa District)</p> <p>1942 Bethel (closed)</p> <p>1943 Tillinghast (New Auburn)
Stevens Point</p> <p>1917-1945 Chittamo (closed)
Superior (closed)
Carr Valley (closed)
Trippville (closed)
Tillinghast (closed)
Mill Creek (closed)</p> <p>1961 Stevens Point (closed)</p> <p>1945-1967 (specific dates unknown)
Milwaukee
Janesville
Madison First
Madison Good Shepherd</p> |
|---|--|

1945-1967 (specific dates unknown) (continued)

Waukesha
Hales Corners
Eastman
Millville
Hancock
Wisconsin Rapids
Anchorage, Alaska

1967 Kenosha (closed)

1968 (Merger of Wesleyan Methodist and Pilgrim Holiness Churches)

Eastman

1969 Exeland—Pilgrim (closed)

1970 Valley United Methodist Church (supply)
Green Bay—Pilgrim (closed)

1972 Bloomington
Millville (closed).
Madison First Church (closed)

1973 Valley(closed)

1976 Anchorage (transferred to the General Dept. of Extension and Evangelism)

1979 Mukwonago

1980 Onalaska (Sand Lake)

1981 Valley United Methodist (transferred to Wisconsin District Wesleyan Church)

1986 Dodgeville
Grafton
Appleton (closed)

1988 Mt. Pisgah and Oak Ridge (merged)

1992 Hudson/Prescott area

1994 Prescott/Hudson (closed)
Dodgeville (closed)

1995 Milwaukee Trinity (closed)

1998 Rice Lake (Red Cedar Community Church)

1999 Madison--Good Shepherd (closed)
Madison/Middleton - Lakeshore

2000 Superior--Safe Harbor

2002 Cumberland--Northern Lakes Church

2005 Milwaukee Hispanic Church (Casa de Dios)

2006 Sparta (closed)
Minong--The River

2007 Milwaukee--Transformation City
Springbrook--Gull Lake (closed)

2008 Rice Lake --Red Cedar Hispanic.
New Berlin -- Casa de Restauracion

2009 Rice Lake-- High Point (closed)
Baraboo (closed).
Milwaukee--Hales Corners (closed)
Milwaukee-- "Iglesia de Restauracion"
(affiliate)

2010 Milwaukee--Myanmar Christian Fellowship
Bloomer--The Fountain

2011 Milwaukee--Iglesia de Restauracion (ended affiliation)
Waunakee--North Ridge
Burr and Valley (merged)

2013 New Berlin—Westbrooke (closed)
Hayward--The Shack (Native American mission)
Middleton--Lakeshore Church (closed)
Eastman (closed)

2016 Coulee Life -- Restart (Onalaska)

2017 Milwaukee—Transformation City (closed)

West Wisconsin Conference Presidents:

A. C. Hand	1860-1863
G. Peglar	1863-1864
S. P. Delap	1865-1866
G. Peglar	1866-1867

Wisconsin Conference Presidents:

G. Peglar	1867-1870
D. C. Vaughn	1870-1872
W. C. Mullenix	1872-1873
No record	1873-1874
William Warner	1874-1875
W. C. Mullenix	1875-1879
R. E. Johnson	1879-1880
William Warner	1881-1882
S. A. Gilley	1882-1886
William Warner	1886-1888
R. Powell	1888-1891
A. A. Martin	1891-1894
J. W. Delap	1894-1895

O. S. Warner	1898-1916
F. Decker	1897-1898
O. S. Warner	1895-1897
E. R. Dodd	1916-1917
J. B. Clawson	1917-1945
G. M. Hahn	1945-1950
Loring H. Peterson	1950-1960
David D. Peterson	1960-1967

Wisconsin District Superintendents:

Rev. Dayton Manker	1967-1970
Rev. John Heavilin	1970-1977
Rev. Russell Buck	1977-1993
Rev. Ronald Walker	1993-1998
Rev. Mark Gorveatte	1998-2000
Rev. Phil Stevenson	2000-2001
Rev. J. Dan Bickel	2001-current

Notes regarding 1967 to the present:

- 1968-- District office was located at Eau Claire
Authorized funds for a Tabernacle Building at Burr Camp.
- 1969-- Implementation and financial matters resolved following the denominational merger of The Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Pilgrim Holiness Church. The property sale at Exeland, WI, covered any such financial considerations.
- 1970-- Rev. Benjamine Drown was authorized to supply the Valley Methodist Church.
Authorized construction of a Recreational Building at Burr Campground
Authorized the sale of the District office/parsonage in Eau Claire
- 1972-- Outreach services were begun in Bloomington (furnishings were loaned to a lay group from our Millville property)
Divided our District into three zones—Northern, Southwest and Southeast Zones.
- 1975-- Recommended the District Superintendent be a part-time position.
- 1976-- The Anchorage Wesleyan Church as released to the supervision of the General Dept. of Extension and Evangelism.
- 1980-- Approval given to work with Mt. Pisgah in a pioneering effort in Onalaska, Wis.
- 1981-- Approved the transfer of the Valley United Methodist Church and property to The Wesleyan Church
- 1982-- The Hillsboro/Burr Circuit was dissolved.
Approval for a Christian School at Spooner
- 1986-- Authorized a pioneering effort at Dodgeville under the supervision of Rev. Stephen Rhoades.
Pursued the issuance of 10-year bonds to finance District indebtedness.
Approved the West Allis Church to start a pioneer effort in Grafton, Wis.
- 1987-- Authorized the purchase of a District office in the area northeast of Madison
- 1988-- Authorized the merger of Mt. Pisgah and Oak Ridge
- 1991-- Elected a committee to review and bring recommendations to the DBA for pastoral compensation/support and to define “full-time” and “part-time” pastoral service.
- 1992-- Began a pioneer effort in the Hudson/Prescott area and authorized the purchase of a parsonage/meeting center for this purpose
- 1993-- Authorized the pay-off of all outstanding District bonds.
Authorized the sale of the District office at Morrisonville
Authorized the purchase of a District office in the Eau Claire area.
- 1996-- Continued discussion of the philosophy and goals of church planting.

- 1998-- Authorized the planting of a second Wesleyan Church in Rice Lake (Red Cedar Community Church).
Reviewed presentations and recommendations regarding the future of Burr Wesleyan Campgrounds.
- 1999-- Elected a “Burr Wesleyan Camp Feasibility Study Committee”
Spent considerable time in analyzing the District and formulating a District Mission Statement and establishing our District Core Values.
Approved the relocation of the Wisconsin District Youth Camp from Burr Camp.
- 2000-- Continued work on our District Mission Statement and Core Values.
Authorized dialog with the Illinois District regarding ministry cooperation and/or merger
- 2001-- Elected the Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partnership Committee with authority to organize, establish a Partnership treasury, and develop a plan for ministry in Nicaragua.
Authorized District financial support for the Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partnership.
Authorized the sale of the Burr Wesleyan Campgrounds.
- 2003-- Approved the development of the Leadership Development Journey Program within the District.
- 2004-- Established a District Church Planting Task Force for the purpose of developing a church planting philosophy and in assessing and recommending areas for church planting throughout Wisconsin.
Authorized the Burr Camp sales proceeds to go to the Church Planting Fund.
Extended an invitation to Rev. Enrique Montenegro, Nicaragua, to visit our District
- 2005-- Approved plans for a Hispanic Church in the Milwaukee area and appointed Daniel Munoz as pastor. (Casa de Dios)
Renewed the Nicaragua/Wisconsin Partnership Agreement for another five years
- 2008-- Approved the Rice Lake Hispanic Church effort.
Approved a pastor for a new Hispanic Church plant in the greater Milwaukee area.
- 2009-- Approved an affiliate relationship with “Iglesia de Restauracion(Milwaukee)”.
- 2010-- Approved the Myanmar Christian Fellowship Church plant in Milwaukee.
- 2011-- Approved the merger of the Burr and Valley Wesleyan Churches.
- 2013-- Approved “The Shack” (Hayward) as a mission effort to Native Americans.
- 2015-- Approved entering a Wisconsin/Uganda Partnership with Global Partners.
- 2016-- Approved the dissolution of the Nicaragua/Wisconsin Partnership
Approved a satellite campus of Red Cedar Church in the Eau Claire area