

# **A HISTORY OF HUS MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA**

*ADAPTED FROM A HISTORICAL TREATISE  
WRITTEN BY CHARLOTTE STELCIK*

Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, began as one of two Protestant Czech churches in the city. The building that currently is home to the church is located between J Street SW and Bowling Street SW on 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The actual address is 2808 Schaeffer Drive SW. Why give a different location than the actual address? Because Schaeffer Drive SW is only about 3 blocks long making it difficult to find. To really understand the hardships and the prosperous times which this church has undergone, we must go back into history and trace the steps of the Czech Protestant people to this day.

## **EUROPEAN BEGINNINGS**

The religious situation among the Czechs has been unique, for among no other immigrants who have come to the United States, have there been so many people who professed religious liberalism. The origin of this liberalism may be traced back to fifteenth-century Bohemia where the followers of Jan Hus sought to correct the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church and to offset Austrian autocracy with Czech democracy. For two centuries following Jan Hus, Protestantism was the dominant religion of Bohemia; then came the defeat of the Czechs in the battle of White Mountain and the subsequent supremacy of Austria and the Roman Catholic Church. Many of the Protestants fled to other countries or remained in Bohemia to worship in secret, still clinging to the motto of Jan Hus, "Seek the truth, hold the truth."

Perhaps it would be well to say a few words here about Jan Hus and his beliefs. To Bohemia Jan Hus is more than a religious reformer; he is the national hero, the great prophet of the Czechs. In lofty idealism and courage as well as in dramatic details, and in his martyrdom, his life was not unlike that of the great prophets of the past, and is even today a source of inspiration to the Czechs. Also they consider the Hussite wars the most glorious periods of their history. Through the moral courage of his convictions and his ideals, and through the influence he exercised, Jan Hus merits a distinguished place among the forerunners of modern thinkers who advocated freedom of thought.

The direct causes of the Hussite movement were in nature religious, social, and national in character. Among the first causes was the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1419 the Hussites, radicals and moderates agreed on a common program called the Four Articles of Prague, stipulating first, that the Gospel should freely be preached; second, that all mortal sins and other misdemeanors against the laws of God should be prohibited and prosecuted; third, that Holy Communion under both kinds should be taken by all; and last, the priests should abandon all possession of worldly goods and should live up to the teachings of Christ. The Hussite wars are of great importance as the first significant effort made by a whole nation against the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, and as the first attempt of its kind in asserting the modern principle of freedom of conscience and of democracy.

In spite of the Hussite movements, Catholicism soon became the prevailing religion in Bohemia, and ninety-six percent of the people professed the faith. After the Toleration Patent of 1781, issued by Joseph II of Austria, religious freedom was granted to Lutherans and

Calvinists but not to the Bohemian (Moravian) Brethren. Protestants, Catholics, and Free-Thinkers, made up the Czech immigration to the United States.

In the nineteenth century when a liberal trend appeared in Bohemia, Charles Havlivek, with his anti-clerical ideas led a movement against the Roman church and some of the liberal-minded Czechs, who had fled from Bohemia during the revolution of 1848, renounced a religion which to them was associated with the Austrian autocracy. They gladly welcomed the American idea of the separation of church and state.

### **THE CENTRAL WEST BOHEMIAN PRESBYTERY**

Before explaining the actual beginnings of Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church in Cedar Rapids, it is necessary to consider the beginnings of the Central West Presbytery of which the local church became a member in November, 1908. This was the beginning of an effort to consolidate all the Czech churches in the Central West states together.

The foundations of the churches of the Central West Presbytery were laid in the pioneer period of the central states and manifest the characteristics of the settlements about the middle nineteenth century. The Church today is reaping the results of their hard toil, abundant faith, honest work, simple wants, and high ideals, all abundant contributions to the agricultural development of the Middle West.

The founders of the Czech churches were sons and daughters of the Reformed Church of Bohemia and Moravia. Their immigration to the United States commenced after the downfall of the democratic uprisings in Europe in 1848, and with the approaching reaction against political and ecclesiastical autocracy.

From their mother church, these settlers brought the heritage of faith in God, the Bible, the prayer book, and the hymnal. Unlike other happier immigrants they were not accompanied by ordained spiritual leaders. For forty years the Bohemian Protestant pioneers kept the Christian fellowship without a ministry and without any assistance from abroad. Yet they met regularly for worship, often in the homes of their neighbors, built churches, and hoped for a trained ministry. The reliance upon self-help in religious nurture has not disappeared. In 1920, at a time of threatening dearth in the number of candidates, the Committee of Education advised the return to the "well tested method of laymen leading in service in church and Sunday School where no other better way" was provided. It is touching to read of the appeals sent to the only man available, in the fifties, for a preaching service and for the administration of the sacraments. This man was the Rev. Francis Kun, an ordained minister from Bohemia, a man with extensive university and theological training. Descended from a family of preachers, he was an admirable leader and an unselfish friend. This pioneer evangelist arrived in Tama County in 1856 and tilled the soil while waiting for a call. Demands soon were coming from neighboring states. Mr. Kun accepted the call to Ely, Linn county, Iowa, October 1, 1860, and made Ely the base for his visitations of Bohemian congregations. Besides, he filled for two years the chair of professor of Latin and Greek at Western College, Western, Iowa, prior to its removal to Toledo.

Of his stern resolve and his devotion to what he considered his duty to co-religionists, we can form a faint conception when we remember that he often braved a trip of sixty miles through roadless country to visit people. That was before the Civil war. He preached in English, Czech, or German, as circumstances required. Rev. Kun came to the United States in 1856.

Before coming, he was warned that "the prospects for a Czech pastor were not encouraging." The worthy man died at Ely in 1894 in his sixty-ninth year.

The year 1888 is a milestone in the history of the Churches of the Central West. So far the Bohemian churches existed as Independent Reformed Congregations without union among themselves or any denomination.

In September, 1888, three candidates for the ministry, Joseph Bren, Vaclav Losa, and Francis Pokorny, arrived and entered Union Seminary under the care of the Presbytery of New York. After a survey of their work, Dr. Vincent Pisek of New York presented a favorable report which was supported by the synodical superintendents; whereupon the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions became responsible for mission work among the Bohemians in the Central West. The independent congregations one by one were organized into Presbyterian churches by the presbyteries within whose bounds they were located. Within six years the churches so organized were all served by resident pastors. In addition every pastor in the respective churches regularly visited and preached at one or more stations in nearby towns.

The fraternal associations in presbyteries worked for the benefit and inspiration of the pastors. The elders and the membership, due to language difficulties, received the spiritual impact of the great Presbyterian Church indirectly through their ministers. To counteract this temporal deficiency all the Bohemian Presbyterian churches in the United States, together with the Independent Reformed churches of Ely, Iowa, and Silver Lake, Minnesota, formed an informal organization called the Evangelical Union. This organization became the training school of the elders and of the members in cooperation among churches. At the first meeting of the Union at Racine, Wisconsin, in 1893, the publication of a Bohemian monthly church paper, "The Union," was agreed upon and the publication of the paper was committed to Dr. Pisek of New York. In 1896 the weekly Sunday School paper, "The Besidka," very ably edited Dr. Pisek. The publication of the church monthly was discontinued in 1898. The Sunday School paper was taken over by the Presbyterian Board of Publication and then was supplanted by the incomparable English publications of the Board.

On November 1, 1908, a convention of the Bohemian and Reformed Churches in the United States was held in Omaha, Nebraska, to which Hus Memorial church sent a delegate. This was the beginning of an effort to keep all the Czech churches together. The convention met every year in different Czech churches in various states. Out of this evangelical union grew the organization of the Central West Presbytery to which churches in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota belonged.

The Central West Bohemian Presbytery was established by act of the General Assembly in session at Atlantic City, May 28, 1910, and became part of the Synod of Iowa. In pursuance of the enabling act of the General Assembly the Presbytery was convened by the Rev. Vaclav Hlavaty, pastor of the Bohemian Presbyterian Church of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, at that city on September 12, 1910. In order to secure as full a representation of all churches as possible, the smallest especially, at meetings of the Presbytery, the Presbytery voted a rule to pay out of the Presbytery treasury one-half of the railroad fare to delegated elders and ministers. The rule was fully justified by the returns of hearty cooperation. The educational responsibility was ably led by a line of chairmen of the Sunday School, the Young People, and the Educational Committees. Rev. B. A. Filipi gave the Sunday Schools in the Presbytery a new direction by bringing to the attention of teachers and superintendents the results of the research of the Board of Sunday Schools. The first Sunday School Conference was held at Blue Rapids, Kansas, where it became a biennial institute.

With the exception of Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church of Cedar Rapids, the Central West Presbytery was a rural one. At that time the rural churches were centers of spiritual life, not for a single nationality, but for the whole communities where they were located.

### **EARLY BEGINNINGS IN LINN COUNTY**

In 1860 there were about 6,000 people in Cedar Rapids when Czech immigration began. By the middle of the 1860's there was a goodly number of Czech Protestants in Cedar Rapids. The first beginnings of religious worship were difficult for the Czechs because many of them severed their relations with the Catholic Church. These people were led by atheists who made the word Christian despised by the Czech people. Fanatic atheists roamed among the Czechs in Cedar Rapids preaching mostly concerning the denial of Christianity and claimed that the expedient plan would go back to Greek culture. For this reason the Cedar Rapids Czech community came to be called Czech Athens. Among the first immigrants there were very few Protestants. Many became atheists because they were afraid to stand for the faith of their Hussite forefathers. They were known as the Evangelicals of the Reformed church. These people did not at first publicly espouse their religion but by holding meetings in their homes, they met and strengthened one another. Because of their poverty, it was years before they were able to afford a building in which to hold their religious services; therefore they met in homes to sing hymns to the accompaniment of a violin.

Occasionally these Protestants walked to Ely, nine miles from Cedar Rapids, to hear sermons by the Reverend Francis Kun, the minister of the Reformed Church in that rural community. This church, which had been organized in 1858, was the first Czech Protestant church in the United States.

Since the long trek to Ely was difficult for these people, they began to think of a place of their own for meeting. This couldn't be realized, though, because in 1869, F. B. Zdrubek, with his newspaper, "Pokrok," which means advancement, attacked the religious people, the word of God, and led the Czech people to the desecration of the Lord's Day in a disgraceful manner. It became a day for picnics, drinking, parties, which became so disgraceful that in many cases public officials had to take action. Only after this man left Cedar Rapids did the American people begin to notice the small group of Christians among the Czech and their efforts to establish a church.

In 1868 Miss E. J. Lund, a public school teacher, reported to her pastor, Reverend James Knox of the First Presbyterian Church, that only a few of her pupils attended any form of religious services. As a result a Sunday School for these Czech children was organized in July of that year and conducted in a small house on the corner of Seventh Avenue and Fifth Street near the Adams school. It was later held in two rooms of the Second Ward School. The whole congregation gladly accepted the friendly hand that was extended to them by Rev. Knox and some other of the English-speaking ministers in Cedar Rapids who took interest in the Czech people and served them. Our brethren began to meet in the old, empty building of the First Presbyterian Church. There they continued to hold services until the old church was torn down. To this old church Rev. Kun walked from Ely and preached three or four times a year.

After 1870, because the children lived too far away from the old First Presbyterian Church, attendance at the Sunday School decreased rapidly. Then in the year 1874, the Czech Evangelical people found a good friend in T. M. Sinclair, the owner of a packing plant where many of these people were employed. Sinclair was a devoted Christian and philanthropist. He gave the group fatherly care and because there was no better place, he made it possible for

the group to meet in the factory in a shop where boxes were made. Here the congregation used boxes as seats and continued services for two years. Sinclair encouraged Czech Protestants to persevere in their efforts and invited workers to services; furthermore, in 1877 he built the Hope Mission Chapel (Third Presbyterian Church) on the hill in back of Saint Wenceslaus Church. Here at three o'clock Sunday School classes were taught in the English language, and at four o'clock church services were conducted in Czech. Rev. Kun came occasionally to preach and with the support of Sinclair, the little group increased and prospered.

During that same year, Rev. J. E. Szalatnay, superintendent of the Reformed churches in Bohemia, visited the Cedar Rapids congregation. Mr. Sinclair tried to persuade him to remain as the local pastor and even guaranteed him a salary, but Rev. Szalatnay found it impossible to comply with this urgent request. Because it was impossible for him to remain in Cedar Rapids, he searched for a preacher in Europe, mainly in Edinborough, where Czech theologians studied, but he met with no success.

Two years later, on September 12<sup>th</sup>, with the aid of Mr. Sinclair, this little group of Protestants formally organized a Czech Reformed Church with Frank Nemecek, Jan Dudycha, and Karl Hromatka as their first elders. Services continued in the Hope Mission Chapel, conducted either by visiting ministers or by elders. Finally a Russian, Rev. Bonekempr, who offered to preach to the Czech congregation, came to the city at the expense of Mr. Sinclair. Since Rev. Bonekempr's knowledge of the Czech language was poor, it was only with difficulty that the members of the congregation were able to understand him. Because of that difficulty his work was not successful. He preached his last sermon July 2, 1882. In the meantime Mr. Sinclair's sudden death on March 24, 1881 brought sorrow to the congregation who he had so ably assisted.

After Rev. Bonekempr's brief pastorate, the church was often aided by Rev. Edward R. Burkhalter, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church. From 1883 to 1890 Rev. Kun again preached in the Hope Mission Chapel once a month. When he came, services were well attended. Other people who conducted services during that time were Rev. Schaffler of Oberlin College; John Rundus, John Musil, and F. T. Bastel, theological students at Oberlin; and Frank Rundus from Park College in Missouri.

### THE FIRST CHURCH

The year 1889 was the most important year in the history of the church. On March 10, 1889 the church permanently organized as a Reformed Church with about one hundred members. By-laws were written and the church was incorporated. The brethren at once began thinking of building their own sanctuary. It so happened at the time that the Congregational Church wanted to sell their building; therefore on May 2<sup>nd</sup> this church was bought for \$1600 and moved to its new site on the corner of Ninth Avenue and Seventh Street SE. On July 7<sup>th</sup> the church was dedicated by Rev. Kun and several American preachers before a huge crowd of people.



On September 29, 1889, this church became part of the Cedar Rapids Presbytery which did much to help the Protestant Czech work. Until 1910 the church was a member of the Cedar Rapids Presbytery; in that year it became part of the newly organized Central West Bohemian Presbytery which was talked about earlier.

In the summer of 1890 Vaclav Dudycha, who was the son of one of the first elders and a student at Union Theological Seminary, preached without remuneration in this new church. That fall Vaclav Hlavaty came to the United States as a candidate of theology. He was born in Bohemia, studied in the gymnasia in Kolin, Bohemia, and had studied theology in Vienna and Edinburgh. He came to Cedar Rapids during the Christmas holidays and preached in this newly organized church. On January 7, 1891, the congregation called him to be their minister and on January 25<sup>th</sup> he was ordained by the Presbytery of Cedar Rapids and installed. From that time on services were held every Sunday and the work of God continued favorably but many times with difficulty. A few months after Rev. Hlavaty's ordination, a debt of \$735 on the church property was paid with the help of the First and Second Presbyterian Churches. After a thirty year struggle to attain their goal the people of this congregation at last had their own place of worship and a regular minister of their own nationality.

The church maintained a preaching station in Walker, whose population consisted of about seventy Czech families, and in 1892 Rev. Hlavaty was requested to visit the community and preach the Word of God. From that time on he visited them regularly and preached in the country school, four miles southeast of Walker. About thirty-five members composed the congregation while most of the others deserted Christianity for atheism. Services however were well attended. This work stopped after Rev. Hlavaty ceased to work in Cedar Rapids.

Rev. Hlavaty's ministry was an epoch of progress for the church. Within a period of two years, 1891 to 1893, the enrollment of the Sunday School grew from twenty-five to one hundred fifty members and from 1891 to 1900, the church membership increased from ninety to 220 people. In the spring of 1892 a Christian Endeavor, which met on Sunday evenings, was organized with fifty members. By 1900 this organization had grown to seventy members. On Wednesday evenings, biblical and prayer meetings were organized. In 1900 the church had 220 members; 150 pupils in Sunday School with 15 teachers. The following brethren, F. Nemecek, Jos. A. Popelka, V. Horak, John Dudycha, Jos. Troyak, and Frank Stary served as elders.

In the fall of 1892, a fine new manse was built for \$1600. This parsonage, which was built on the lot adjoining the church, was erected mainly through the efforts of the women of the church to raise the money.

On August 21, 1906, the Brotherhood of American Yeomen was founded and the local chapter "Jeronym" was established in this church. The name Jeronym was chosen to venerate the name of a professor at Prague University in 1416 who was later burned at the stake. The organization was a secret lodge which was conducted for insurance as well as fellowship of Protestant people. It was in existence until 1918.

The highest number of church members was reached in 1913 with 297 making up the congregation. It is also evident from the minutes that the church partly supported a Czech Home Missionary, Miss Mary Belerad.

In October, 1913, several women decided to organize a ladies society. They gave their club the name "Martha." Soon they changed it to "Tabitha," the name it held until it no longer had

any members. The organization began with nine members but by 1915 had grown to twenty-two. By 1949 there were ninety-two members. In 1915 the annual bazaar was started and became one of the main events of the organization. They also served a supper that was attended by a large crowd each year.

## THE SECOND CHURCH



In 1906, when plans were formulated for a new church, a building fund was created. Eight years later, in 1914, a total of \$5,000 was on hand. On June 23, 1915, the old church building was sold and moved away to make room for the new structure. On July 6<sup>th</sup>, Jan Hus Day, ground was broken for the new Bohemian Presbyterian Church.

On July 15, 1915, the elders met in the German Evangelical Church where the congregation held services while the new church was being built. The corner stone was laid on August 21, 1915. The building, complete with furnishings, was to cost \$24,000 but actually the final total reached \$30,000. On Sunday, January 9, 1916, Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church was dedicated free from debt. Dr. J. Bren preached the dedicatory sermon assisted by visiting ministers from Cedar Rapids and vicinity, and other Czech churches in the Middle West.

The following article appeared in the January 11, 1916 edition of the Cedar Rapids Republican”

“The dedication services of the Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church were celebrated Sunday to the satisfaction of all participating. It was a day long to be remembered by those who were in attendance.

Short services at 10 o'clock in the morning were held before the opening of the gates of the edifice. Many persons from adjoining towns, Center Point, Walker, Vinton, Fairfax, Luzerne, and Mt. Vernon, were present. The meeting was opened with the signing of the Hundredth Psalm after which Rev. A. Paulu of Vining offered up a prayer and Rev. Pokorny of Ely, gave a short address. Miss Marie Pudil presented the keys of the church to its pastor, Rev. V. Hlavaty, the articles being laid on a platter bordered with roses. Rev. Hlavaty, with suitable remarks, opened the doors in the name of God.

The regular service began by the singing of ‘How Amiable are Thy Dwellings, O God,’ and in a short time the auditorium was filled by its congregation. Rev. Hlavaty offered a dedicatory prayer and Rev. Bren, of Hopkins, Minnesota, preached the dedication sermon. Rev. Pokorny read a poem, composed by himself, especially for the occasion. A collection of \$1,500 was taken up which leaves but a very small debt. Thirty new members joined the church.

In the afternoon at three o'clock, services continued, this time in the English tongue. After the opening hymn, Rev. F. H. Shedd conducted a session of scripture reading and Rev. Dr. Ferguson followed this with prayer. Two quartets from the Sinclair Memorial Chapel rendered two songs. Rev. R. B. A. McBride spoke at length on ‘The Church of

Today' and Rev. E. R. Burkhalter spoke on 'What the World Owes Bohemia from the Religious and Historical Standpoint.'

A second hymn by the congregation followed the close of this address. Rev. A. M. Jayne spoke on behalf of the Ministerial Union and with singing of America and the benediction by Rev. E. R. Burkhalter, the services were closed.

In the evening the third service consecrated. Short addresses were given by Rev. Paulu, Rev. Dudycha, and Rev. Bren. Rev. M. Spinka, pastor of the Reformed Bohemian Church, extended greetings. Several songs by the choir, under the direction of Joseph A. Popelka, were thoroughly enjoyed. Rev. Hlavaty brought the celebration to a close by his speech of thanks to the contractors, the building committees and the ladies who so generously prepared and served dinner and supper to the guests."

The church was a brick structure (which is still standing and being used for worship by another congregation) which measures thirty-six by thirty-six feet. It was divided in the middle by a door which could be raised or lowered. The auditorium seated five hundred people. Above the main sanctuary, on the balcony, were four rooms used for Sunday School. In the basement there was a large hall in which dinners were served, meetings held, programs given, and plays presented. Adjoining this room was an adequately equipped kitchen. On the other side of the large hall there was a smaller room which was used for recreation, and half of the room served as the nursery for the youngest group in the church.

On December 12, 1916, an interesting meeting of the Czech people was held in the church which was filled to capacity. Dr. Bohumil Simek, a professor at the University of Iowa, was the speaker. The purpose of the meeting was the liberation of the Czech people from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The people of the church always try to help in the old country's freedom—morally, politically, and financially. A collection of \$379 was taken.

In the winter of 1917 the church installed a new organ at the cost of \$2,100. It was finished on December 15<sup>th</sup> and dedicated at a special program on December 24<sup>th</sup> of that same year.

In October, 1916, the girls decided to organize a society. Thirteen girls then established a club which they called Esther. Their purpose was to help needy families. This organization, like several others, faded away in time. The Boy Scouts undertook their first organization under the auspices of the church in 1916.

The Christian Endeavor organization can be traced back through the minutes almost to the very beginning of the church. In addition to their program of religious education and fellowship, they sponsored ice cream socials, presented plays, and presided over booths at the bazaars. In the late 1940's the group changed their name to the Westminster Youth Fellowship. This group also faded away in time.

An annual event of the church is the Christmas program which was given on the Sunday evening preceding Christmas. All age groups from the Sunday School took part. The church platform in the main sanctuary was decorated and in the afternoon of the day of the program two Christmas trees were decorated by the young people. The program, which was directed by the superintendent of the Sunday School, consisted of recitations given by individuals, and usually exercises were offered by various age groups. Each Sunday School group had something to offer. The choir also took part in the program. It was customary for several children each to recite a poem or some small selection in Czech.

In 1918 a number of Sunday evening programs were held by the congregation. These were not necessarily religious in nature but consisted of lectures of educational nature. Various speakers came to talk to the people on these evenings.

### **DR. JOSEPH BREN'S PASTORATE**

On June 4, 1919, Rev. Hlavaty, who was the pastor of Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church until 1919, resigned. The congregation tried to persuade him to remain but had to accept his resignation on June 22, 1919. He gave his last sermon on June 29, 1919. Rev. Hlavaty was succeeded by Dr. Joseph Bren of Hopkins, Minnesota. Dr. Bren, a native of Bohemia and a graduate of Union Theological Seminary in New York, was a man of scholarly mind and in his pastorate tried to encourage better Christian education of adults and children. He began his work on Sunday, December 20, 1919.

During his ministry, which lasted until 1938, he led the church in celebration various Czech historical days—Jan Hus Day on July 6<sup>th</sup>, and days for Comenius and Masaryk. Dr. Bren entertained many visitors from Czechoslovakia who lectured to the congregation—Dr. Prudky, Dr. Novak, Dr. Zilka, Dr. Krenek, Rev. John Kucera, Prof. Kozak, and Rec. Hornicek are some who came. Since the church was interested the religious life of the old country, it gave a great deal of money for the support of that work.

The Lord's Supper was served a little differently in this church than in most churches. The church originally had used one common cup. On April 24, 1921, at the annual meeting, the church voted also to use the individual cups. These were donated by Mrs. Frances Caloud. The members of the congregation are served by going to the Lord' Table at the front of the main sanctuary. The first to come forward were the older people who still preferred to take the wine from the one common cup. These were followed by those who preferred individual cups.

Dr. Bren started annual banquets for fathers and sons, and for mothers and daughters. At these banquets an educational program was presented. All of these banquets, carried on for several years, were great successes.

Various other organizations were also developed during Dr. Bren's pastorate. In 1922 the need for religious education for young people was met by establishing a Saturday Religious school but the elders could not decide whether it should be taught in Czech or English. In 1921 a girls' glee club called the Hussite Club and a boys' club and a girls' club independent of the Young People's Society, were organized.

As time went on and the need for services in the Czech language declined the membership of the church grew smaller. It began with 297 members in 1920 and by 1926 there were 222 members. The society called Esther closed its activities in 1927 but a fresh effort to organize the Boy Scouts was made. During the annual meeting on January 12, 1928, the members of the church voted to purchase hymn books in English for the Sunday School. Then in 1932, during Easter Week the elders decided to hold an occasional service in English. Also during the week of October, 1932, out of a month of services, one was to be in English. It was found that the English services were best attended. By 1933 the church membership was 194.

Until 1923, the confirmation class of young people was conducted in the Czech language. The young people had to learn the short catechism, the commandments, and the Apostles Creed in Czech. In 1924 the elders decided to hold the confirmation classes in English because most of the young people did not understand all the religious implications when presented in the less familiar Czech language.

Changes in the language also took place in the Sunday service. On September 16, 1934, the elders called a meeting of the congregation at which the members voted to hold English services every second Sunday of the month "for those who do not understand Czech." Since these were Sunday evening services, they were not well attended and were dropped on April 5, 1936 for lack of attendance. Even the morning church services were poorly attended and the life of the church grew weaker.

Every summer during Dr. Bren's time the church and Sunday School had a picnic on some Sunday at someone's farm. These picnics were well attended. By 1949 these church picnics had been abandoned. The church now does a "Service in the Park" at Jones Park which is followed by a potluck.

The church membership continued dropping. On April 4, 1934 it fell to 167 and by April of 1938 to 162 members. The annual congregational meeting again decided that Sunday evening English services should be held the first Sunday of the month but they again proved to be poorly attended; soon afterwards they were dropped.

The young people conducted a Sunday morning service once a year with good results. They planned and were in charge of the entire service. This continued for many years before being dropped. In the fall of 2005 the youth of the church once again began doing services; however now they do a service on the last Sunday of each month that has 5 Sundays in it, usually about 4 services a year.

On March 20, 1938, Dr. Joseph Bren offered his resignation because of his advanced age.

### **THE TERM OF REV. BENJAMIN PAROULEK**

A special meeting of the congregation took place Sunday, June 19, 1938 for the purpose of electing a new pastor. The Rev. Benjamin Paroulek, who had visited the church and preached on May 15, 1938, was chosen as the new pastor. His salary was to be \$1,200. Rev. Paroulek, a young man, was born in this country and spoke the Czech language with little difficulty. His wife did not speak Czech. He started work on Sunday, October, 10, 1938. He again used English in the services on the first Sunday of every month.

The life of the church was improved by the leadership of Rev. Paroulek and the attendance at services became better. He desired to bring the English language into the service gradually, so he began giving a short talk in English during each Czech service.

Rev. Paroulek started a boys' club and a girls' club, which lasted during his stay but which were discontinued at his leaving. He also organized a visiting committee to gain members for the church. During this same year, 1941, black choir robes were purchased and English hymn books were provided. The Sunday School was reorganized and Mrs. Emily Leksa was appointed Sunday School superintendent. During this period attendance of the Sunday School improved.

A new custom of combining the Thanksgiving service with the West Side Czech Reformed Church, whose pastor was Rev. Milo Filipi, was established in 1941. Hus Presbyterian Church still participates in an Ecumenical Thanksgiving service but the churches involved have changed. Each year the services are rotated between Asbury United Methodist Church, Hope Lutheran Church, Hus Presbyterian Church, and St. Ludmilla Catholic Church with each pastor taking part as well as a combined choir.

A Union of Czechoslovak Protestants was organized in Chicago of which this church became a member. In this organization the Czech churches and ministers of all denominations were united. The main purpose was to represent the Czech Protestants and to aid the Protestants in Czechoslovakia.

On April 17, 1941, rev. Benjamin Paroulek resigned, having been called to Azusa, California. Then came the task of calling in a new minister. This was solved by the election of a pulpit committee to act on such matters.

### **HUS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH THROUGH 1949**

Rev. Zdenek F. Pauk from West, Texas came to preach on Sunday, July 20, 1941. There was a large attendance in church that Sunday and the congregation unanimously decided to call him. His salary was set at \$1500. Rev. Pauk entered upon his work at Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church October 1, 1941. He also served as chaplain of the Iowa State Guard at Camp Dodge, Iowa.

Rev. Paul at once decided to hold double services every Sunday morning in both languages. On Christmas and Easter Sunday, the services were always combined into one with great success. This continued for many years. Almost at once the church began to grow through the English services and new members kept coming in. Dr. Joseph Bren very willingly assisted the new pastor in visiting all members. A new life was built throughout the church.

It was decided to buy a new supply of English hymnbooks for the English service and also a supply of new Czech hymnbooks was ordered. A junior choir was organized and new white robes were made for them. This choir served the English service while the older choir was present at the Czech service. On June 4, 1942, Mrs. Martha Felter was elected as the new superintendent of the Sunday School.

Dr. V. Losa published a Christian Journal, "Krestanske Listy," in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the Czech language. For about fifty years it served the Czech Protestants all over the world. Dr. Losa died and the Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church decided to discontinue the paper. Many Czech people demanded that the paper still be published. When Dr. Joseph Bren, Dr. Frank Pokorny, Rev. Ludvik Burian, Rev. Milo Filipi, and Rev. Zdenek F. Pauk offered to do the work, the paper was transferred to Cedar Rapids. Rev. Milo Filipi was appointed editor and Rev. Zdenek F. Pauk, business manager. The paper was still being published in 1949 with a circulation of about 2,000. Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church gave a room for the business of the paper.

During the years of the war the members of the church started a fund called Providence Fund. Small banks in the shape of churches were distributed to all the families of the congregation. They were to put once cent into the little "church banks" at each meal and the money thus raised was saved for a time of need after the war.

During World War II, on December 1, 1943, Dr. Joseph Bren died. He had been pastor of the church from 1919 to 1938.

Programs for each Sunday's services had been printed on a mimeograph machine and introduced in 1941, but in 1943 new folders with beautiful pictures for every Sunday were used. To print these programs each Sunday; a large mimeograph machine was bought.

On April 12, 1944 the church gave a leave of absence to Rev. Pauk so that he might serve as Chaplain in the army. During Chaplain Pauk's absence Rev. Frank Sintak, a retired Czech minister who had settled in Robins, Iowa was asked to conduct the Czech services. Leaders for various activities were appointed from among the congregation. Mrs. Anna Vavra led the senior choir while Mrs. Elsie Drahovzal took charge of the juniors. Mrs. Martha Felter remained as superintendent of the Sunday School and also took charge of the young people's group. The printing of the programs and newspaper announcements were undertaken by Mr. Edward Kacer and Mr. Frank Vavra. Rev. E. J. Wykle of Cedar Rapids, a retired minister, served the English service. All were under the guidance of the elders. Quite remarkably this plan worked well and the church did not lose any members during the pastor's leave of absence.

Rev. Pauk was disabled in the Pacific Theater of War and returned to the United States. Although he had to report to several military hospitals from November 1945 to February 1947, he managed to come back to the congregation on most Sundays.

A War Restoration Fund was organized by the Presbyterian Church to collect twenty-seven million dollars. Hus Memorial's part was \$2,450, which was given in December of 1945, the first year of the campaign. Several donations of food and several cases of clothing were also sent to Czechoslovakia by the church.

During the war, the School of Religion at the State University of Iowa was collecting recordings of foreign religious hymns and Dr. Marcus Bach came to the church to record the Czech hymns. The Ely Church and the West Side Reformed Church took part with Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church and some of the records were sent to the Congressional Library in Washington D. C.

About this time the question came up of deciding whether or not the Central West Presbytery should be dissolved. The churches belonging to the Presbytery were asked to vote on the question before the convention, which was to be held in Wahoo, Nebraska, in August 1946. Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church voted unanimously to discontinue the Czech Presbytery and become members of the Cedar Rapids Presbytery. At the convention all churches, except one, voted to dissolve the Presbytery but to hold on to the Evangelical Union, "Evangelicka Jednota," for the purpose of contacts between Czech churches. The Central West Presbytery had been established for thirty years and its last convention was held in Cedar Rapids in 1948. The church then became a member of the Council of Churches of Cedar Rapids and Marion.

In 1946 anew organization, called the Married Couples Club, was organized with Dr. Leo B. Sedlacek as its first president. From the very beginning of its organization, this group was a success and it continued to grow. During the winter, once each month, a supper was prepared and a lecture or a religious film was presented. The group had purchased a Bell-Howell sound film projector to show the films. During the summer the club had outdoor services in parks, such as the Palisades.

The annual meeting of April 16, 1947, voted to establish a board of Deacons with six members. The first group consisted of John Drahovzal, Ben Drahovzal, Milo Heral, Frank Fajmon, Milvoy Neprash, and Jerry Stelcik. Their duty was to care for the needy, to provide a welcome in the church, take up the offering, and promote friendliness.

The financial side of the church was very favorable during this time. Before Rev. Pauk was called, a house was bought next to the church, which was used as a rental property. The manse was remodeled at an expense of over \$3,000. The church was repainted at a cost of \$1,500, paid by the Ladies Tabitha Society. A new stoker and boiler were installed. No financial canvas or pledges were taken. All money was taken from voluntary contributions in weekly envelopes. The pastor's salary was also raised to \$2,400 in addition to the use of the manse. The membership of the church continued to grow during this time.

In 1948 the church began to prepare for a new teaching plan which would lay the main duty of Christian Education on the parents and the home. The church provided fine material and training for this. A new superintendent, Frank Pardubsky, was appointed for the Sunday School.

Throughout the years, Hus Presbyterian Church sponsored several young men in theological studies--Joseph Leksa, Joseph Havlik, Joseph Teply, Emil Drobny, Anthony Pavlinec, Vaclav Kejr, Frederick Telecky, Jerome Leksa, and Jerry Mollman.

Another period in the history of Hus Presbyterian Church drew to a close on Sunday, October 5, 1947, when, because of disability, Rev. Z. F. Pauk resigned. The congregation unanimously asked him to remain and postpone his resignation at least until the annual meeting in January 1948. For reasons of health, the pastor presented his resignation again on January 14, 1948. He agreed to stay until a successor was obtained.

On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of Hus Presbyterian Church, they looked back, just as we do today, at the struggling but successful voyage that was undertaken to bring them where there were. The years have been ones of many hardships but the numerous obstacles were met by a group of people who had a faith in and hope in God strong enough to keep them struggling for their own place of worship. Through the efforts of these pioneers and those that have followed, many individuals have been brought to hear the Words of the Lord. Another period is unfolding, but in order to see what the coming years hold in store for the little church, we can only keep our eyes to the future and our hearts and prayers to God.

The church continued to grow after Rev. Pauk's retirement and in 1949 the membership grew to over 300 members.

### **HUS CHURCH, 1950 - PRESENT**

Check back for more soon!

## Ministers of Hus Presbyterian Church

Rev. Vaclav Hlavaty	served	1891 to 1919
Rev. Dr. Joseph Bren	served	1919 to 1938
Rev. Benjamin J. Paroulek	served	1938 to 1941
Rev. Zdenek F. Pauk	served	1941 to 1954
Rev. Joseph Havlik	served	1955 to 1959
Rev. William B. Harnish	served	1963 to 1966
Rev. Lyle R. Graff	served	1967 to 1971
Rev. Dr. George B. McDill	served	1972 to 1984
Rev. John W. Gilmore	served	1986 to 1991
Rev. Oluf Kongshaug	served	1993 to 1999
Rev. Wilfred Jackson	served	2001 to present