Religion in Louisiana: A History

Beauregard Parish Has Congregation of Mennonites

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About eight miles south of DeRidder on U.S. Hwy. 171 in Beauregard Parish there is a brick church building which looks like many other rural churches. However, this one is unique inasmuch as it is the main Mennonite congregation in the state.

A smaller, but unorganized group, may also be found in the Terrebonne Parish area, but they have not established a church of their own. A congregation with only 16 members is located in Lake Providence.

This church in DeRidder, made up of hard-working anti-war constituents, is a member-congregation of the Church of God in Christ (Mennonite), a denomination founded by Swiss, Dutch and German believers who, like other Anabaptists, were forced to leave their homelands and wander about for many years, first to Holland and later to Russia, being evicted after a promise of freedom of worship and conscientious objection was not kept by Catherine the Great. They then emigrated to Canada and then to the United States.

The history of the Mennonite church is not unlike that of several other religious bodies which hold to beliefs in "re-baptizing" and opposition to war.

The first Mennonite congregation of historical record was organized at Zurich, Switzerland, in 1525, consisting of Swiss Brethren, or Tauer, who disagreed with the theologian Ulrich Zwingli in his readiness to convert to a union of church and state. Also, this group was opposed to infant baptism and hence were to be classified with those religious groups known as Anabaptists, or re-baptizers.

A leader of these Anabaptists in Holland was Menno Simons (1496-1561), who had been baptized by Obbe Philips, an early refuge, in 1538. Followers of Menno Simons eventually would become known as Mennonites. Simons was a converted Roman Catholic priest who organized numerous Anabaptist congregations in Holland and who was so prolific in this movement that contemporaries gave his name to that movement.

Many followers crossed the English Channel on the invitation of Henry VIII, but in England, as well as in Germany, Holland and Switzerland they met opposition largely because of their determined distrust of any union of church and state. An impressive martyr roll was created, one which might have been much larger had it not been for a sudden offer of sanctuary in the American colony of William Penn.

Many of the first Mennonites in this country came to Germantown, near Philadelphia, Pa., in 1683. They soon were joined by others of similar faith from Russia, Prussia and Poland, and, because of their historic resistance upon non-resistance their colonial settlements were comparatively peaceful and prosperous. From the northeastern area they began to settle elsewhere throughout the American mainland.

Although there are many branches of Mennonites, including the Church of God in Christ (Mennonite), all have one thing in common, not only historically but doctrinally as well. The faith of all Mennonites is a continuation of the Anabaptist, or Schwarzenau faith, of Max Zorn, the first leader of the group. The church of God in Christ (Mennonite) is a very conservative body, retaining many of the customs and practices of the Old Order Mennonites.

In 1850, a Convention of Mennonites was held in New York City, and it was at this convention that the Church of God in Christ (Mennonite) was organized. The church has grown steadily since then, and today it is one of the largest denominations in the United States.

The main emphasis of the Church of God in Christ (Mennonite) is on simplicity and consistency. Members are known for their strict dress codes, which includeplain clothes and hats, and for their emphasis on community and self-sufficiency.

The Church of God in Christ (Mennonite) is a member of the National Council of Churches, an umbrella organization that brings together a wide range of religious groups in the United States.

The Church of God in Christ (Mennonite) has a strong commitment to social justice and peace, and its members are active in a variety of social and political movements. The church has a long history of participation in the civil rights movement and other social justice causes.

The Church of God in Christ (Mennonite) is a strong voice in the ongoing conversation about the relationship between faith and politics. It is a denomination that is actively engaged in the public square, and its members are known for their crossing of religious and political divides to work for the common good.

The Church of God in Christ (Mennonite) is a denomination that is committed to the principles of simplicity, consistency, and social justice. It is a church that is known for its strong commitment to the timeless message of the gospel, and its members are a community that is committed to living out that message in the world.