

Great Lakes Christadelphian Bible School History

The Great Lakes Christadelphian Bible School (GLCBS) was inspired by previous bible schools located in Arkansas (1923), Kentucky (1934) and Ontario, Canada. Some brethren attended the new Canadian Christadelphian Bible School in 1967 and returned home with the idea of starting a family bible school to serve Christadelphians in the Midwest.

A special meeting was held in the home of Bro. Ralph Kirwin in Crystal Lake, IL on August 20, 1967 to discuss plans. 22 representatives from the Rockford, Crystal Lake and Chicago Ecclesias (churches) met to discuss preliminary plans for a possible bible school. Attendees included the following brethren: David Bostian, Glen & Connie Johnson, Ray & Juanita Johnson, Ruth Johnson, Judy Johnson, Ron Joyce, Ralph & Jesse Kirwin, Tom & Mildred Mazzola, Paul & June Pertle, C.L. & Hazel Treadway, Cecil & Eunice Treadway, MacGregor Ward, Herbert & Dixie Zilmer and Norm Zilmer. After some discussion, C.L. Treadway motioned, Mac Ward seconded and all voted in favor "that we establish a Christadelphian Midwest Bible School" with the goal to begin in the summer of 1968. The initial Bible School committee was agreed to include Cecil Treadway, Ralph Kirwin, Herbert Zilmer, Glen Johnson and Ray Johnson. Bro. Ray Johnson had previously investigated having the school at the Rockford College in Rockford, IL. All discussed this location and agreed that this school would be suitable for a Mid-West Bible School.

About 220 people attended the first GLCBS and there was much enthusiasm for bible prophesy since Israel had captured Jerusalem and other lands in the Six Day War in 1967. The belief in the Kingdom of God on earth, and Jesus' Second Coming, coincide with Christadelphians belief that Jerusalem will be the capital of the future Kingdom. (Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 14:1-9; Acts 1:4-11; Luke 19:11)



The *Rockford Register-Republic* newspaper wrote a news article about the first bible school with the title "Christadelphians Await Immortality on this Planet" on August 3, 1968. This information was true, but the article appeared slightly more negative than positive. The bible school proved to be popular over time and attendance increased with many states represented each year. The Christadelphians are a lay community, meaning there are no paid ministers, so volunteer speakers would present multiple classes each year. Well-known international Christadelphian speakers such as Alfred Norris and Harry Whittaker taught at the Rockford location. In the 1980's, 300-400 people would attend this bible school and members from the Church of God of Abrahamic Faith (COGAF) began joining together as well.

Christadelphians Await Immortality on This Planet

By GEORGE DEPEW
Staff Religion Writer

Unlike some other sects with whom it shares some common beliefs about the imminent end of the world, the Christadelphians use no door-pounding or arm-twisting techniques to gain converts.

Religion

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A 4

Saturday, Aug. 3, 1968

Although they've been around a hundred years, their number remains small — fewer than 5,000 in the United States — but this doesn't seem to particularly perturb them.

"We feel the Scriptures indicate that those who will be saints will be small in number," said Ralph Kirwin of Crystal Lake. He is chairman of the Christadelphian Bible School Committee and was at Rockford College this week for a Bible school that attracted about 200 people from all over the United States and Canada.

"There are probably a number of reasons why Christadelphian teaching is not popular," he said. "We don't believe in the immortality of the soul, for instance, or that you are going to heaven or hell at death."

Christadelphian tenets condemn all the wicked to eternity in the grave after the day of judgment, and the righteous — among whom they hope to count themselves — to reign with Christ forever in their own bodily forms on earth.

The faithful thumb their Old and New Testaments — which they regard as equally valid in revealing prophecy — looking for signs pointing to when this happy day will occur.

"We believe it is near by virtue of one of the greatest signs — the rebirth of the nation of Israel.

"Luke 21:24 says 'Jerusalem shall be trodden of the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.' The Christadelphians believe it was fulfilled on

June 6, 1967, when the Israeli Jews wrested the city of Jerusalem from the Arabs.

"The victory is an indicator that the second coming of Christ is near at hand, but as to a specific date, Scripture says that no man knoweth the time nor the hour."

The Christadelphians, which means brethren in Christ, was founded in 1848 by John Thomas, a medical doctor, who first joined Thomas and Alexander Campbell, founders of the Christian church, but then broke with them over certain Biblical tenets he felt were not being emphasized.

The group was organized formally in the Civil War to justify the members refusal to serve in the military service.

"We have maintained a consistent position since the Civil War as conscientious objectors."

The Christadelphians have been willing to serve two-year hitchees mainly in hospitals under civilian authorities, and have had no legal trouble with the government over their pacifist position, Kirwin explained.

The Christadelphians are much more numerous in Britain than the United States. They are strongest in certain eastern cities in this country and in Canada. Outside of an ecclesia (church) in Chicago, a small group meets in a home in Crystal Lake and a group of about 25 meet for the mandatory Sunday memorial services in the YWCA building in Rockford.



Looking over a map of the location of Christadelphian ecclesias in the United States and clippings of articles about their beliefs is a group who attended a week-long Bible conference at Rockford College. Ralph Kirwin, kneeling with hand on board, chats with Ray Johnson, 231 Rose Ave., Loves Park, in front of board. Christadelphians have no paid ministry. (Register-Republic photo)

In 1989, the GLCBS bible school relocated to the Wayland Academy in Beaver Dam, WI. This facility was much more compact, but lacked some helpful accommodations and proved to be too small for 300+ attendees. The bible school had leaner attendance at Wayland, and fewer memories. After only two years at Wayland, the Academy signaled that they would prefer having other groups during the summer and so GLCBS needed to look for an alternative site. The bible school members determined to move and Ray Pratt searched library files to find a suitable location. Eventually he located Lakeland College (now Lakeland University) in Sheboygan, WI and the bible school moved there for the 1991 summer school.

Lakeland became home to a new generation who enjoyed the remote setting and a bigger facility able to handle our bible school size. GLCBS stayed at Lakeland for 28 years and had a good relationship with the school administration. GLCBS always meets over July 4, from Saturday to Saturday, and this time slot was normally unused at this school. The bible school grew in attendance to peak at well over 400 attendees, enough where a maximum cap was sometimes necessary. GLCBS is also one of the lowest cost Christadelphian Bible schools, in part due to lower Midwest costs and also due to how children and young people's "donation" is subsidized. Many wonderful memories were made at this school. Three-to-six speakers would prepare five adult classes each year, plus various afternoon activities and evening presentations. Special music programs were highlights for many, as were Fireside Chats, prophecy classes and plenty of time for fellowship with new friends. The bible school library was a helpful place to find Bibles, Christadelphian books and Christian shirts as well.



Lakeland had become less welcoming when a new administration began making changes in 2018 and we knew it was time to look for a new location. In 2019, the GLCBS Bible school moved from Sheboygan, WI to the new home at Manchester University in Manchester, IN. Another Christadelphian Bible school had researched this location and gave us the lead since they did not meet during the same timeframe (www.midwestbibleschool.com). Manchester is a larger school, more central to members travels and a welcome change to a new setting. Air conditioning was a big plus too! The first year worked well and news spread about the new location, which helped travelers from Canada and the East Coast. Unfortunately, the 2020 and 2021 schools were cancelled due to Covid-19 issues. GLCBS picked up again in 2022 and plans to continue, God willing, until Jesus

returns to earth as King. As Jesus said, *“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”*. (Matthew 6:10)