

# RIVER BRETHREN

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## GENERAL STATEMENT

In the latter part of 1750 about 30 Mennonite families in Canton Basel, Switzerland, after a long period of persecution, during which they suffered both imprisonment and loss of property, decided to emigrate westward. They went first to England, and in the fall of 1751 set sail for America. The voyage across the Atlantic was disastrous, one of the ships, with all their goods, being lost, and they landed poor and destitute. One company, including John and Jacob Engle, and others whose names are uncertain, settled near the Susquehanna, in the western part of Lancaster County, Pa., in the spring of 1752.

In 1770, as a result of the labors of some members of the Lutheran, Mennonite, and Baptist churches, who were grieved at what they considered the formalism which then characterized the churches, there was, in that region, a notable revival, which was attended by many conversions. It was conducted principally by Messrs. Otterbein, Boehm, Bochrans, and the Engles, representing the different bodies. Subsequently difference of views arose in regard to the form of baptism, some holding that the applicant should make choice of the method, while others claimed that trine immersion was the only proper form. The result was that they mutually agreed to work independently, in accordance with their various interpretations of the Scriptures.

The believers in trine immersion had no regular organization, but were in the habit of designating the various communities as brotherhoods. There was thus the Brotherhood down by the River, meaning in the southern part of Lancaster County; also the Brotherhood in the North, the Brotherhood in Dauphin, the Brotherhood in Lebanon, the Brotherhood in Bucks and Montgomery, etc. The outlying brotherhoods looked to the brotherhood in the southern part of Lancaster County as the home of the organization, and it was probably due to this fact that the general term "River Brethren" was given to the entire body. Another explanation has been given by some, namely, that they were in the habit of baptizing in the river. With the development of these brotherhoods it seemed advisable to select some one to perform the duties of the ministerial office, and the choice fell upon Jacob Engle, who thus became their first minister.

In course of time dissensions arose concerning what would now be called minor points, which ultimately caused divisions. In 1843 the body known as "Yorker" or, as some have termed them, "Old Order" Brethren, withdrew, and in 1853 the body known as "Brinsers," but later as "United Zion's Children," also withdrew.

The three bodies grouped under the name River Brethren, in 1926, 1916, and 1906, are listed in the following table, with the principal statistics as reported for the three years.

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR THE RIVER BRETHREN, 1926, 1916, AND 1906

DENOMINATION AND CENSUS YEAR	Total number of churches	Number of members	VALUE OF CHURCH EDIFICES		EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR		SUNDAY SCHOOLS	
			Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Number of scholars
<b>1926</b>								
<b>Total for the group.....</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>5,697</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>\$426,860</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>\$99,084</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>5,444</b>
Brethren in Christ.....	81	4,320	72	348,860	74	92,901	63	5,057
Old Order or Yorker Brethren.....	10	472	-----	-----	6	500	-----	-----
United Zion's Children.....	28	905	22	78,000	18	5,683	7	387
<b>1916</b>								
<b>Total for the group.....</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>5,389</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>\$286,000</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>\$34,752</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>5,458</b>
Brethren in Christ.....	72	3,805	64	218,875	69	31,841	58	4,631
Old Order or Yorker Brethren.....	9	432	-----	-----	3	400	-----	-----
United Zion's Children.....	31	1,152	27	67,125	30	2,511	9	827
<b>1906</b>								
<b>Total for the group.....</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>4,569</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>\$165,850</b>	-----	-----	<b>41</b>	<b>2,812</b>
Brethren in Christ.....	73	3,397	72	143,000	-----	-----	39	2,695
Old Order or Yorker Brethren.....	9	423	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
United Zion's Children.....	28	749	20	22,850	-----	-----	2	117

# UNITED ZION'S CHILDREN

## STATISTICS

Summary for the United States, with urban-rural classification.—A general summary of the statistics for the branch of River Brethren known as United Zion's Children, for the year 1926, is presented in Table 1, which shows also the distribution of these figures between urban and rural territory.

The membership of this denomination consists of those persons who have been admitted to the local churches upon profession of faith and are in good standing. Baptism is by trine immersion.

**TABLE 1.—SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR CHURCHES IN URBAN AND RURAL TERRITORY, 1926: UNITED ZION'S CHILDREN**

ITEM	Total	In urban territory <sup>1</sup>	In rural territory <sup>1</sup>	PER CENT OF TOTAL <sup>2</sup>	
				Urban	Rural
<b>Churches (local organizations)</b> .....	28	5	23		
<b>Members</b> .....	905	238	667	26.3	73.7
Average per church.....	32	48	29		
<b>Membership by sex:</b>					
Male.....	369	85	284	23.0	77.0
Female.....	488	118	370	24.2	75.8
Sex not reported.....	48	35	13		
Males per 100 females.....	75.6	72.0	76.8		
<b>Membership by age:</b>					
Under 13 years.....	5		5		
13 years and over.....	724	151	573	20.9	79.1
Age not reported.....	176	87	89	49.4	50.6
Per cent under 13 years <sup>3</sup> .....	0.7		0.9		
<b>Church edifices:</b>					
Number.....	22	5	17		
Value—Churches reporting.....	22	5	17		
Amount reported.....	\$78,000	\$31,500	\$46,500	40.4	59.6
Average per church.....	\$3,545	\$6,300	\$2,735		
<b>Expenditures during year:</b>					
Churches reporting.....	18	1	17		
Amount reported.....	\$5,683	\$1,437	\$4,246	25.3	74.7
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$4,546	\$1,012	\$3,534	22.3	77.7
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$1,137	\$425	\$712	37.4	62.6
Average expenditure per church.....	\$316	\$1,437	\$250		
<b>Sunday schools:</b>					
Churches reporting.....	7	2	5		
Officers and teachers.....	48	20	28		
Scholars.....	387	160	227	41.3	58.7

<sup>1</sup> Urban territory includes all cities and other incorporated places which had 2,500 inhabitants or more in 1920, the date of the last Federal census; rural territory comprises the remainder of the country.

<sup>2</sup> Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

<sup>3</sup> Based on membership with age classification reported.

The data given for 1926 represent 28 active churches of United Zion's Children, all of them in the State of Pennsylvania, with 905 members. The classification of membership by sex was reported by 26 churches, and the classification by age was reported by 22 churches, including, however, only 3 which reported any members under 13 years of age. No debt on the church edifices and no parsonages were reported.

**Comparative data, 1890-1926.**—Table 2 presents, in convenient form for comparison, a summary of the available statistics of this denomination for the censuses of 1926, 1916, 1906, and 1890.

**TABLE 2.—COMPARATIVE SUMMARY, 1890 TO 1926: UNITED ZION'S CHILDREN**

ITEM	1926	1916	1906	1890
<b>Churches (local organizations)</b> .....	28	31	23	25
<b>Increase <sup>1</sup> over preceding census:</b>				
Number.....	-3	3	3	-----
Per cent <sup>2</sup> .....	-----	-----	-----	-----
<b>Members</b> .....	905	1,152	749	525
<b>Increase <sup>1</sup> over preceding census:</b>				
Number.....	-247	403	224	-----
Per cent.....	-21.4	53.8	42.7	-----
Average membership per church.....	32	37	27	21
<b>Church edifices:</b>				
Number.....	22	27	20	25
Value—Churches reporting.....	22	27	20	-----
Amount reported.....	\$78,000	\$67,125	\$22,850	\$8,300
Average per church.....	\$3,545	\$2,486	\$1,143	-----
Debt—Churches reporting.....	-----	3	1	-----
Amount reported.....	-----	\$11,550	\$1,000	-----
<b>Expenditures during year:</b>				
Churches reporting.....	18	30	-----	-----
Amount reported.....	\$5,683	\$2,511	-----	-----
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$4,546	\$1,588	-----	-----
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$1,137	\$923	-----	-----
Average expenditure per church.....	\$316	\$84	-----	-----
<b>Sunday schools:</b>				
Churches reporting.....	7	9	2	-----
Officers and teachers.....	48	105	18	-----
Scholars.....	387	827	117	-----

<sup>1</sup> A minus sign (—) denotes decrease.

<sup>2</sup> Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

### HISTORY, DOCTRINE, AND ORGANIZATION <sup>1</sup>

Questions of administration or ceremonial detail, particularly in connection with a church building, arose among the River Brethren in 1852. The next year about 50 persons in Dauphin and Lebanon Counties, Pa., withdrew and in 1855 organized under the leadership of Matthias Brinser as their first bishop. They were thus generally called "Brinsers," but later adopted the name "United Zion's Children." They are found principally in Dauphin, Lancaster, and Lebanon Counties, Pa.

Their doctrine is essentially the same as that of the Brethren in Christ <sup>2</sup>, and their confession of faith is about the same. They practice baptism by trine immersion, which must be preceded by "thorough repentance and remission of sins" on the part of the applicant. They also observe the ceremony of foot washing, in connection with the communion services, generally called love feasts, which are held several times during the year.

They have a home for their own aged and poor, as well as for such who do not belong to this church; this is valued at \$60,000.

<sup>1</sup> This statement, which is substantially the same as that published in Part II of the Report on Religious Bodies, 1916, has been revised by Bishop Henry G. Light, and approved by him in its present form.

<sup>2</sup> See Brethren in Christ, p. 290.