

# 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	Num- ber 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

# BRETHREN IN CHRIST

## STATISTICS

Summary for the United States, with urban-rural classification.—A general summary of the statistics for the Brethren in Christ 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. Baptism is by trine immersion.

TABLE 1.—SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR CHURCHES IN URBAN AND RURAL TERRITORY, 1926: BRETHREN IN CHRIST

ITEM	Total	In urban territory <sup>1</sup>	In rural territory <sup>1</sup>	PER CENT OF TOTAL <sup>2</sup>	
				Urban	Rural
Churches (local organizations).....	81	19	62		
Members.....	4,320	1,036	3,284	24.0	76.0
Average per church.....	53	55	53		
Membership by sex:					
Male.....	1,862	446	1,416	24.0	76.0
Female.....	2,458	590	1,868	24.0	76.0
Males per 100 females.....	75.8	75.6	75.8		
Membership by age:					
Under 13 years.....	174	23	151	13.2	86.8
13 years and over.....	3,776	771	3,005	20.4	79.6
Age not reported.....	370	242	128	66.4	34.6
Per cent under 13 years <sup>3</sup> .....	4.4	2.9	4.8		
Church edifices:					
Number.....	78	20	58		
Value—Churches reporting.....	72	18	54		
Amount reported.....	\$348,860	\$146,460	\$202,400	42.0	58.0
Average per church.....	\$4,845	\$3,137	\$3,748		
Debt—Churches reporting.....	2	1	1		
Amount reported.....	\$5,172	\$4,872	\$300	94.2	5.8
Churches reporting "no debt" on church edifice.....	61	14	47		
Parsonages:					
Value—Churches reporting.....	4	3	1		
Amount reported.....	\$12,750	\$11,750	\$1,000	92.2	7.8
Expenditures during year:					
Churches reporting.....	74	17	57		
Amount reported.....	\$92,901	\$39,682	\$53,219	42.7	57.3
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$39,179	\$22,568	\$16,611	57.6	42.4
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$53,722	\$17,114	\$36,608	31.9	68.1
Average expenditure per church.....	\$1,255	\$2,334	\$934		
Sunday schools:					
Churches reporting.....	63	16	47		
Officers and teachers.....	694	177	517	25.5	74.5
Scholars.....	5,057	1,492	3,565	29.5	70.5

<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 81 active churches of the Brethren in Christ, with 4,320 members. The classification of membership by sex was reported by all of the 81 churches and the classification by age was reported by 73 churches, including 41 which reported members under 13 years of age.

Of the four local organizations reporting parsonages, none reported debt on such parsonages.

**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: BRETHREN IN CHRIST

ITEM	1926	1916	1906	1890
<b>Churches (local organizations)</b> .....	81	72	73	78
Increase <sup>1</sup> over preceding census:				
Number.....	9	-1	-5	
Per cent <sup>2</sup> .....				
<b>Members</b> .....	4,320	3,805	3,397	2,688
Increase over preceding census:				
Number.....	515	408	709	
Per cent.....	13.5	12.0	26.4	
Average membership per church.....	53	53	47	34
<b>Church edifices:</b>				
Number.....	78	64	73	45
Value—Churches reporting.....	72	64	72	
Amount reported.....	\$348,860	\$218,875	\$143,000	\$73,050
Average per church.....	\$4,845	\$3,420	\$1,986	
Debt—Churches reporting.....	2	1	2	
Amount reported.....	\$5,172	\$215	\$475	
<b>Parsonages:</b>				
Value—Churches reporting.....	4	4	4	
Amount reported.....	\$12,750	\$9,000	\$8,000	
<b>Expenditures during year:</b>				
Churches reporting.....	74	69		
Amount reported.....	\$92,901	\$31,841		
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$39,179	\$15,479		
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$53,722	\$16,362		
Average expenditure per church.....	\$1,255	\$461		
<b>Sunday schools:</b>				
Churches reporting.....	63	58	39	
Officers and teachers.....	694	617	455	
Scholars.....	5,057	4,631	2,695	

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

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

**State tables.**—Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 present the statistics for the Brethren in Christ by States. Table 3 gives for each State the number and membership of the churches classified according to their location in urban or rural territory and the total membership classified by sex. Table 4 gives for selected States the number and membership of the churches for the three censuses from 1906 to 1926, together with the membership for 1926 classified as under 13 years of age and 13 years of age and over. Table 5 shows the value of church property and the debt on such property, for 1926 alone. Table 6 presents, for 1926, the church expenditures, showing separately the amounts expended for current expenses and improvements, and for benevolences, etc., and also gives the data for Sunday schools. Separate presentation in Tables 5 and 6 is limited to those States in which three or more churches reported the principal items shown (values or expenditures), in order to avoid disclosing the financial statistics of any individual church. The States omitted from these tables can be determined by referring to the complete list which appears in Table 3.

**TABLE 3.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES IN URBAN AND RURAL TERRITORY, AND TOTAL MEMBERSHIP BY SEX, BY STATES, 1926: BRETHREN IN CHRIST**

GEOGRAPHIC DIVISION AND STATE	NUMBER OF CHURCHES			NUMBER OF MEMBERS			TOTAL MEMBERSHIP BY SEX		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	Males per 100 females ( <sup>1</sup> )
United States.....	81	19	62	4,320	1,036	3,284	1,862	2,458	75.8
Middle Atlantic:									
New York.....	1		1	38		38	16	22	
Pennsylvania.....	45	9	36	2,775	574	2,201	1,194	1,581	75.5
East North Central:									
Ohio.....	10	4	6	348	116	232	136	212	64.2
Indiana.....	2		2	86		86	40	46	
Illinois.....	2	1	1	92	37	55	34	58	
Michigan.....	3		3	97		97	40	57	
West North Central:									
Iowa.....	3	2	1	60	46	14	25	35	
Kansas.....	8	1	7	436	100	336	211	225	93.8
South Atlantic:									
Maryland.....	1		1	16		16	7	9	
West South Central:									
Oklahoma.....	2		2	171		171	72	99	
Pacific:									
California.....	4	2	2	201	163	38	87	114	76.3

<sup>1</sup> Ratio not shown where number of females is less than 100.

**TABLE 4.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES, 1906 TO 1926, AND MEMBERSHIP BY AGE, 1926, BY STATES: BRETHREN IN CHRIST**

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches in either 1926, 1916, or 1906]

STATE	NUMBER OF CHURCHES			NUMBER OF MEMBERS			MEMBERSHIP BY AGE, 1926			
	1926	1916	1906	1926	1916	1906	Un- der 13 years	13 years and over	Age not re- ported	Per cent un- der 13 <sup>1</sup>
United States.....	81	72	73	4,320	3,805	3,397	174	3,776	370	4.4
Pennsylvania.....	45	34	32	2,775	2,275	1,872	130	2,468	177	5.0
Ohio.....	10	12	11	348	406	517	5	343		1.4
Indiana.....	2	3	3	86	138	138		86		
Illinois.....	2	3	3	92	47	93	2	90		
Michigan.....	3	3	3	97	77	61		61	36	
Iowa.....	3	2	3	60	31	47	3	57		
Kansas.....	8	7	10	436	498	450	18	418		4.1
Oklahoma.....	2	2	3	171	136	67	16	155		9.4
California.....	4	2	1	201	114	51		44	157	
Other States.....	2	4	4	54	83	101		54		

<sup>1</sup> Based on membership with age classification reported; not shown where base is less than 100.

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

### DENOMINATIONAL HISTORY

At first the organization of the River Brethren was simple, but as their numbers increased a more permanent form became necessary, and about 1820 the present ecclesiastical organization was adopted. During the Civil War some of the members, although proclaiming the doctrine of nonresistance, were

<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 Rev. H. K. Kreider, secretary of the general executive board, Church of the Brethren in Christ, and approved by him in its present form.

**TABLE 5.—VALUE OF CHURCH PROPERTY, AND CHURCH DEBT, BY STATES, 1926: BRETHREN IN CHRIST**

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches reporting value of edifices]

STATE	Total number of churches	Number of church edifices	VALUE OF CHURCH EDIFICES		DEBT ON CHURCH EDIFICES		VALUE OF PARSONAGES	
			Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount
United States.....	81	78	72	\$348,860	2	\$5,172	4	\$12,750
Pennsylvania.....	45	41	37	160,900				(1)
Ohio.....	10	11	9	28,360	1	300		(1)
Michigan.....	3	3	3	4,600				(1)
Iowa.....	3	3	3	29,500				(1)
Kansas.....	8	8	8	35,000				
California.....	4	4	4	34,000	1	4,872		
Other States <sup>2</sup> .....	8	8	8	56,500			4	12,750

<sup>1</sup> Amount included in figures shown for "Other States," to avoid disclosing the statistics of individual churches.

<sup>2</sup> The figures for value of parsonages include data for churches in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Iowa.

**TABLE 6.—CHURCH EXPENDITURES AND SUNDAY SCHOOLS, BY STATES, 1926: BRETHREN IN CHRIST**

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches reporting expenditures]

STATE	Total number of churches	EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR				SUNDAY SCHOOLS		
		Churches reporting	Total amount	For current expenses and improvements	For benevolences, missions, etc.	Churches reporting	Officers and teachers	Scholars
United States.....	81	74	\$92,901	\$39,179	\$53,722	63	694	5,057
Pennsylvania.....	45	41	40,144	13,013	27,131	37	457	3,120
Ohio.....	10	8	7,689	3,947	3,742	6	43	329
Michigan.....	3	3	1,438	316	1,122	1	9	60
Kansas.....	8	8	10,085	4,549	5,536	7	66	535
California.....	4	4	17,555	9,098	8,457	2	13	104
Other States.....	11	10	15,990	8,256	7,734	10	106	909

drafted for military service, and it became evident that the denomination must secure legal recognition as a religious organization holding that doctrine. Steps to secure such recognition were taken at a private council held in Lancaster, Pa., as early as 1862, at which time those who remained after the separation of the other two branches, and who constituted the great majority of the Brethren, decided to adopt the name "Brethren in Christ" instead of "River Brethren," which was done the following year. In 1904 the organization was incorporated according to the laws of the State of Pennsylvania as "a religious body for the worship of Almighty God," with headquarters at Harrisburg.

**DOCTRINE**

The Brethren in Christ have not accepted any historical creed or confession, but have certain generally recognized doctrines to which they adhere. They believe that the church is "built on faith in an almighty, triune, eternal, self-existent God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." They accept the doctrines of

the immortality of the soul; redemption through Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who makes atonement for the sins of the world; and regeneration through the influence of the Holy Spirit, developing into holy living. They hold that trine immersion is the only proper form of baptism, practice confession of sins to God and man, and observe the sacrament of the Eucharist, accompanying it by the ceremony of feet washing. The recognition of Christ, not only as Savior, but as Lord and Master and King, involves, in their view, the acceptance of the tenets and principles of His government. Accordingly, they believe that, inasmuch as He is Prince of Peace, His kingdom is of peace, and as His subjects, they should abstain from the employment of carnal forces which involve the taking of human life. For this reason the doctrine of nonresistance, in a qualified sense, is a feature of their belief. They consider Freemasonry and all other secret societies to be anti-Christian; they believe in prayer veiling for women, and they advocate the wearing of modest apparel, with nonconformity to the fashions of the world.

#### ORGANIZATION

The ecclesiastical organization of the denomination includes the local church, a system of district councils, and a general conference. The officers of the church are bishops, ministers, and deacons. The bishops preside at all council meetings, officiate at marriages and in the observance of the sacraments, and exercise all functions of the ministry. The ministers are specifically the teaching body, but also do parish visiting, and by request of the bishop, in his absence, administer the sacraments. No salaries are paid, and whatever is necessary for their support is raised by voluntary contributions. The deacons have charge of the business affairs of the churches, serve at the communion table, look after the poor, and also do some visiting in the parish. Officers are elected by the congregations or the councils, but are ordained by a bishop. The membership of the district councils and of the general conference, which meets annually, includes laymen as well as ministers.

#### WORK

The activities of the church are under the care of a general executive board of 5 persons, appointed by the annual general conference. The home missionary work, under the immediate direction of the home missionary board of 7 persons, was carried on in 1926 by 46 workers, who conducted general evangelistic services and cared for 16 missions, while \$15,888 was contributed for their support.

The foreign missionary work is under the immediate direction of the foreign missionary board of 7 persons, carried on in the South African and India fields by 35 workers, at 7 stations, while \$30,535 was contributed for the support of this work during 1926.

The value of mission property in the United States is approximately \$45,000.

The educational interests of the denomination in the United States are represented by three schools—Messiah Bible College, Grantham, Pa., with an enrollment of 100 students and property value of \$40,000, and an endowment of \$70,000; Beulah College, Upland, Calif., with an enrollment of 80 students and property value of \$20,000; and Bethany Bible School, at Thomas, Okla. There are 4 philanthropic institutions with about 100 inmates, holding property valued at \$70,000, which are supported mainly by contributions from the members of the church, and an endowment of \$70,000.

In Southern Rhodesia there are 40 missionary outschools and 8 in Northern Rhodesia, with about 1,100 converts to the Christian faith.