

75 Years of IFCA History

Glen Lehman

IFCA Executive Director 1959-1972



Following the stock market crash in October, 1929 and during the Great Depression of the 1930s, while men groped for economic light, another kind of light illumined the hearts of a small group of men. In 1929 and 1930 they began what we today call IFCA International.

In the 19th Century the philosophies known as Rationalism and Empiricism swept across Europe, leading to the theological expressions of Modernism and Higher Criticism. These anti-supernatural concepts crossed the Atlantic with European trained American students. Bible believing Christians saw the storm clouds gathering as those students assumed greater positions of leadership within American denominations and expanded their anti-supernatural teachings here in the U.S.

Around 1900, national/interdenominational Bible Conferences were becoming loosely coordinated. In America they were in places like Niagara, NY and Sea Cliff, NY and Northfield, MA and Southfield, FL and Medicine Lake, MN and Winona Lake, IN. These Bible Conferences were organized by many of the same leaders who had already worked with D.L. Moody to conduct his local evangelistic campaigns. The Bible Conferences provided an ongoing platform for preachers to respond to the unbiblical teaching that was spreading among denominational leaders, seminary professors, and pastors.

Then from 1910-1915, a twelve-volume doctrinal response to Modernism sequentially came off the presses. Entitled *The Fundamentals*, these twelve paperbacks ultimately contained ninety articles written by sixty-four authors from every denomination. Financed by Milton and Lyman Stewart, the wealthy founders of Union Oil Company, *The Fundamentals* were distributed free of charge to over 300,000 Protestant ministers, teachers, missionaries, theological professors, and Christian workers.

There were several results. First, orthodox theology was presented and defended. Second, apostasy was exposed. Third, Bible-believing Christians were galvanized into a more cohesive force. And fourth, those who opposed “Modernist Christians” were given a new name as Bible-believers: “Fundamentalists.”

The “Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy” by the 1920s caused many congregations to withdraw from their parent denominations. Departure from their historic doctrines by the leadership and involvement in movements contrary to faith gave the churches reason to “come out from among them and be separate,” (2 Cor. 6:17). They did this at great cost, losing many benefits of association and often valuable properties such as church buildings, parsonages, and pensions. But they were “set for the defense of the Gospel,” and committed to an uncompromising stand for the truth of God’s word. New churches were formed with these principles.

The Scriptural need for inter-church fellowship, counsel and cooperation was recognized at the start by these new churches. The American Conference of Undenominational Churches was formed for this purpose.

The Roots of IFCA

The roots of the IFCA actually began at the Lake Okoboji Tabernacle in Arnold Park, Iowa, on September 4-6, 1923. There 24 men from ten states met to organize a fellowship for true Bible-believing pastors and churches who were opposed to the apostasy of their denominations. They called themselves

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the American Conference of Undenominational Churches. However, in the years that immediately followed, the A.C.U.C. was troubled by internal strife, loose affiliation, and a wide doctrinal spectrum.

Mr. O. B. Bottorff, a Christian businessman in St. Louis, Missouri and Director of the St. Louis Gospel Center, was elected President of the A.C.U.C. in 1929. He was concerned for a wider and more stabilized fellowship when he heard about a group that was organizing over in Chicago.

Several Congregational pastors in the Chicago area had engaged in discussions concerning their need for fellowship and the possibility of some mutual cooperation in ministry. Apostasy had swept through Chicago's conference of Congregationalists resulting in the establishment of several independent churches. These new churches were healthy and growing and the ministry of the Word was enjoying a tremendous acceptance. Many left the apostate denomination. Separatist Fundamentalism was in its infancy but rapidly growing beyond that stage. Growth stimulates hunger and their hunger was for fellowship and cooperation.

Mr. Bottorff learned about the Fundamental Congregational churches and pastors in the Chicago area and went to see their leader Pastor William McCarrell of the First (Independent) Congregational Church of Cicero. Mr. Bottorff's intention was to invite Pastor McCarrell and his Chicago area brethren to come into the A.C.U.C. From this contact came further discussion and prayer and a call for a meeting to be held at the First Congregational (Independent) Church of Cicero on February 6, 1930. The Chicago group of 39 men met in February 1930 and voted to join the A.C.U.C. The motion was made by Dr. J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., President of Wheaton College.

The minutes of that February 6, 1930 meeting appeared in the April, 1930 issue of the A.C.U.C.'s magazine *Pioneer of a New Era* as follows:

"Minutes of a meeting of delegates and visitors held at the First (Independent) Congregational Church of Cicero, Illinois, February 6, 1930, said meeting being called by a committee appointed at a previous meeting held at the same church (old building) January 22, 1929. Pastor William R. McCarrell presided and the meeting opened with singing led by Brother E. K. Smith of Moody Bible Institute. President James Oliver Buswell, Jr., of Wheaton College and Pastors M.H. Reynolds of Los Angeles, California, and T.M. Kingsley of Malta, Montana then led in prayer followed by a solo by Brother Smith.

Pastor McCarrell then introduced the speaker, Brother Bottorff, President of the A.C.U.C. who outlined the work of the association. Rev. A.B. Miller of DePue, Illinois then followed and told the story of the movement. Pastor McCarrell then led a discussion by asking some questions and after a goodly number had spoken and asked questions. When an expression had been received from the Pastors present as to their attitude towards the movement, President Buswell of Wheaton College made the following motion:

"It is the sense of this meeting that we favor uniting with the A.C.U.C. with the understanding that the organizations and individuals represented by this meeting will work toward an improvement in the name of the organization, the drafting of a stronger and more comprehensive doctrinal platform and plans to enforce this same program." The motion was seconded by several and unanimously carried.

Brother Reynolds moved that we adjourn and the meeting was closed with prayer by Brother Dodd. Signed, M.V. Morton, Secretary"

Now the die was cast. Out of the motion by Dr. Buswell came the organization that would soon be named the Independent Fundamental Churches of America (what we know today as IFCA International).

The First Convention of IFCA

The A.C.U.C. was invited by the First Congregational (Independent) Church of Cicero to hold their 1930 annual convention in June at Cicero. The A.C.U.C. accepted the invitation.

The First Annual Convention of the Independent Fundamental Churches of America was held June 24-27, 1930. It was an historic event in a church which had a most blessed history under the ministry of Pastor William McCarrell. This great convention was an affirmative answer to this question which appeared in the February, 1930 edition of the Moody Bible Institute Monthly magazine, "Has the time come for Fundamentalists to promptly and literally obey the emphatic commandment given to believers in 2 Cor. 6:14- 18; Eph. 5:11; and 2 John 9-11?"

At the 1930 Convention the name A.C.U.C. was changed to the Independent Fundamental Churches of America and a new constitution and articles of faith were adopted. A new era began!

Representatives at the 1930 Convention included 114 pastors from twelve states extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific, four foreign missionary fields, and four from Canada. The evening audience averaged 800 for the entire convention.

1930-1945: Years of Destiny

Following the 1930 Convention, those who had assembled under the leadership of the Holy Spirit publicly advocated an open and complete break with Modernists and Modernism as an act of loyalty to Christ, to His Word, and to His program for His Church, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. In the new fellowship of IFCA, sincere believers who could no longer conscientiously continue under the denominational management of aggressive, domineering Modernists found a spiritual home.

Many pastors and congregations left the mainline denominations to find a haven of fellowship and cooperation in the IFCA. One example was the North Broad Street Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. The pastor, Dr. Merrill T. MacPherson, had been exposing and opposing liberalism in the denomination. One Wednesday evening in 1936 the pastor and congregation were locked out of their church building by the denominational officials. Undeterred, the pastor and his people founded a new independent church, naming it The Church of the Open Door.

The emphasis in the IFCA during those early years was on the doctrine of biblical separation from theological error. One principal text was 2 Corinthians 6:14: "And be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness and what communion hath light with darkness?"

Growth of the IFCA may be seen in these figures. In 1932 there were 154 individual members. In 1935, there were 551 men and 173 churches. The biblical foundation laid at the beginning of the IFCA provided stability which would be tested in the years to follow.

1945-1960: Internal Change and Development

The birth pangs of the IFCA in the 1930s and early 1940s gave way to the growing pains of the late 1940s and the 1950s. Constitutional and organizational changes became necessary.

The first major doctrinal controversy occurred earlier in 1937: the Hyper-Dispensational view (which rejected water baptism for the Church Age) was dismissed by the convention delegates. Early IFCA pioneer and host of the 1931 Convention Pastor J.C. O'Hair left the IFCA to start another fellowship. During the war years, military chaplains were approved and endorsed by the IFCA. In the new Constitution of 1945, the doctrinal statement was amplified and dual membership (in a denomination and in the IFCA) was no longer permitted. In 1946 a missions policy was adopted: there would be no *Rev. 12.19.14*

national IFCA missionary board for foreign and home missions. In 1947 a rotation system for the terms of officers on the National Executive Committee was adopted. Advisory ordination standards were adopted in 1954 which said that ordination could only be done by local churches. In 1955 the missions policy of 1946 was rescinded (especially related to church extension here in the U.S.) and a referendum was ordered for the 1956 convention in Huntington, WV. Three plans were submitted in 1956 (amidst great controversy) but none received the required votes. The 1956 convention, however, unanimously adopted a compromise (with great rejoicing). Then in 1957 authorization was given to lease or purchase property for the national office. The Home Office, which had been originally established in Cicero, was now moved to Westchester, Illinois.

International fraternal relations were recognized in 1954 with the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches of Great Britain and in 1959 with the Associated Gospel Churches of Canada.

By 1961 there were 22 faculty members who were part of the IFCA fellowship teaching at Christian colleges, Bible colleges or seminaries. There were also 24 Regional organizations, 56 full-time Church Extension representatives and 15 military chaplains. During 1963 the churches represented by the IFCA gave \$5 million for missions and in the same year \$17 million for new buildings.

Further changes in these years included clarification of qualifications for membership on the application forms for individuals and organizations. Group tax exemption for member churches was finally approved by the Internal Revenue Service. The *Voice* magazine carried many doctrinal articles and news of Regional activities. Change and growth in this period won recognition and respect from others including government officials and the military services regarding our chaplains.

1960-1975: Speaking to Doctrinal Error

In the fast-changing environment of a society in moral decay and religious confusion, it was necessary for the IFCA to reaffirm its stand for biblical truth.

Resolutions were adopted on many issues, including New Evangelicalism, ecumenism, abortion, right-to-life, euthanasia, the Charismatic Movement, homosexuality, and biblical inerrancy and authority. It is said that “the only true Christianity is biblical Christianity.” The Bible therefore stands in judgment upon any movement that claims to be Christian as well as all non-Christian religions.

Some members sought to place statements in the IFCA Constitution dealing with doctrinal error in various movements. Instead of this, a policy book was authorized which would contain the resolutions pertaining to movements or subjects in doctrinal error. After some consideration the matter was resolved in 1969 by adding to the IFCA Doctrinal Statement definitions of “Movements Contrary to Faith.” These included Ecumenism, Ecumenical evangelism, Neo-Orthodoxy, and New Evangelicalism. These movements were declared to be “out of harmony with the Word of God and the doctrine and position of the IFCA.”

The IFCA was like the three Hebrew children who stood while the crowd was bowing to their false god, and like Martin Luther when he said, “Here I stand” as he declared his submission only to the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

By 1975 there were 34 Regional organizations, 16 active military chaplains, 11 student chaplains, 1261 individual members and 614 churches. A total of 28 missionary organizations were members of the IFCA movement. They included 13 church extension missions, 11 home missions, and 4 foreign missions. Five Bible institutes and colleges also were members.

The growth and future of the IFCA was a major concern at the 1975 convention when special sessions were held to consider future goals. Twenty years later the interest in setting goals for IFCA experienced a rebirth with the adoption of a mission, vision, and goals statement in 1995.

1975 to 2000: History in the Making

Time marched on and certain events and landmarks stand out in the emergence of IFCA history. A landmark in the history of IFCA International took place with the publication in 1983 of a history of the IFCA under the title *For Such a Time as This* written by Dr. J. O. Henry, a member of the IFCA for over fifty years and History professor at BIOLA University.

Another landmark in our history was the move of the Home Office from Westchester, Illinois to Grandville, Michigan in 1987.

Throughout the years many discussions took place as to what an association of independent churches could do for its members, churches and organizations. In 1993 an ad-hoc committee (Vision Committee) was appointed and they made their report to the 1994 convention after a year's study. With little change their report was adopted at the 1995 IFCA Annual Convention. The Vision Committee's report consisted of three parts:

Mission Statement

Our mission is to glorify God by providing an arena for independent churches and organizations to participate interdependently in the common cause of advancing authentic, dynamic, compassionate Christianity to all people groups.

Vision Statement

We envision ourselves as the Fellowship of choice for independent churches and organizations, desiring to prayerfully work together in the spirit of interdependence.

Values Statement

In fulfilling our vision we are committed to excellence in the pursuit of the following goals: Doctrinal Purity, Unified Purpose, Servant Leadership, Pastoral Mentoring, Expository Preaching, Social Concern, Effective Communication, Sensitive Separation, Holy Living, Fervent Prayer, Evangelistic Zeal, Relevant Teaching, Missions Involvement, and Continual Improvement.

Another landmark date in our history was 1996 when the convention delegates voted to change our name from the Independent Fundamental Churches of America to IFCA International. The name change was ratified by the Regionals and became official at the 1997 convention.

With a new home and a new name and new vision came a new enthusiasm.

Beyond 2000: The 21st Century

We continue to see the blessings of God upon our movement. Now others across the world are learning about the truths of the Bible and the blessings of the independent local church. In the past few years we have seen IFCA-like fellowships spring up in Guyana, Nicaragua, Korea, India, Democratic Republic of Congo and friendly relations with similar fellowships in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Germany and Mexico.

We refined our Purpose Statement so that it now reads: “*Enhancing the strength of the Church by equipping for, and encouraging toward, ministry partnerships to achieve Great Commission objectives.*” We determined that we are seeking to become healthy churches that work together toward Great Commission objectives. We also launched Vision America and Vision World in obedience to Acts 1:8. We identified the Vital Signs of a Healthy Church and have begun other initiatives to train our people in evangelism (IFCA Harvesters) and other worthy goals.

But we today must not forget the men of vision in the first seven decades of IFCA International. They founded the IFCA and set it on its course to face their challenges of the 21st Century. Some of the great men who are part of IFCA International's history include:

Dr. J. Oliver Buswell (President of Wheaton College)
Dr. M.R. DeHaan (founder of Radio Bible Class and *Our Daily Bread* devotional)
Dr. William McCarrell (pastor of Cicero Bible Church, teacher at Moody Bible Institute) Dr. William Pettingill (founder of Philadelphia School of the Bible)
Dr. Judson Rudd (President of Bryan College)
Rev. Peter Deyneka, Sr. (founder of Slavic Gospel Association)
Dr. Louis Talbot (President of BIOLA)
Dr. Charles Feinberg (Dean, Talbot Theological Seminary)
Dr. Lance Latham (Founder of AWANA Youth Ministries)
Dr. John Walvoord (President of Dallas Theological Seminary)
Dr. Samuel Sutherland (President of Biola College and Talbot Seminary)
Dr. J. Vernon McGee (pastor of The Church of the Open Door, Los Angeles)
Dr. Merrill Unger (professor at Dallas Theological Seminary)
Dr. Charles Ryrie (professor at Dallas Theological Seminary)
Dr. Robert Gray (pastor of Westchester Bible Church, Westchester, IL)
Dr. Leslie Madison (President of Calvary Bible College)
Dr. Al Platt (President emeritus of CAM International)
Dr. John MacArthur (pastor of Grace Community Church and President of The Master's College and Seminary)

There are literally hundreds and hundreds of other godly men of vision who helped IFCA International reach the 21st Century with a renewed God-given purpose.

Let us each do our part, facing the future and standing firm in this vital ministry, until our Lord returns!