

PASTOR WILL RABEL - Church of God

INTERVIEWED:

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There are several groups of that name. No intent to be another denomination because the movement known as "The Church of God Reformation Movement" believes division of uniting all Christians everywhere into the "oneness of Christ". Therefore, takes a position of "openness" in the Godward side of all truth and "openness" on the manward side to fellowship with God's people everywhere; the church is not an organization you join but a fellowship of persons who, by spiritual birth, have become members of the family of God. The slogan sometimes used is "Where Christian experience makes you a member". Has no rite of church joining, but a recognition of an experience of fellowship with those who are in Christ. Emphasized unity as essential to truly represent Christ; the Bible is God's word and guidebook; every Christian is a "Priest" with a Ministry of Service. Believe in salvation through the atonement of Christ, and an experience of holiness through the spirit of life. Because of these tenets they hold, this movement works unceasingly to be a redemptive power, reconciling men to God.

Have about 35 congregations in Canada, in the Western provinces -- up to Manitoba. No churches, as such, in the Maritimes or Quebec; there are about ten congregations in Ontario.

Had its beginning in Richmond in 1946. Sunday School meetings held in a converted chicken house on Number 4 Road. A building erected on Bridge Street in 1951, where Reverend Dewey Johnson served as first Pastor. His sisters, Stella and Elsie Johnson, who both teach school in the Vancouver area, initiated the Sunday School in this area, and were followed by their brother Dewey. He left Richmond to become a missionary in

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the Cayman Islands. Subsequent pastors were Claude White, Ralph McGee and Elmer Hildebrand. Ralph McGee is Secretary for the British and Foreign Bible Society and is stationed in North Bay, Ontario.

The present property on the corner of Williams and No. 5 Road has rather a unique history. The property was purchased some eight years ago; when the Canadian Board of Missions became interested in purchasing a portable building to be used at various locations, were first to use it; it was moved onto the site in 1970; used it for three years, during which time built the present facilities. The portable building, although still owned by the Canada Board of Missions, is being used by the North American Indian Mission -- stationed at Merritt.

Considers the congregation at Richmond to be unique; have several "colored" families from St. Kitts, and have been most valuable addition to the congregation; they are very intelligent and co-operative.

Church serves people of Richmond area who have "Church of God" background; people come from Richmond, Surrey, Coquitlam, Vancouver and Burnaby.

Building is about 60' x 72' in size; has a main sanctuary in the center, with Sunday School rooms in the wings. Present plans are to let this become the "Fellowship Hall" when new building is erected, hopefully within the near future; the building now used as parsonage will be moved and the sanctuary will replace it.

Finance: traditionally emphasized tithing, the principle of giving. There have been special efforts for building purposes; have enlisted the help of the Board of Church Extension in Anderson, Indiana, through whose help were able to raise approximately \$27,000. toward the present project, the remainder is dependent upon the free-will offering of the present adherents. Also

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emphasized missions, held first missions conference in 1974, where upwards of \$7,000. was promised for missions -- for at home and on foreign fields. The congregation tithes its general income to the work of the Canadian Board of Missions, which is the missionary arm of the Church of God in Western Canada.

A special project planned for the future: a walk across Canada. He is 59, but confident he can do it, starting from West Coast on March 3, hopes to complete the journey on the East Coast about September 30th. He thought of it before as just a walking expedition, others suggested it might be sponsored, and he decided to do just that. Needed to have worthy causes to justify it as a sponsored walk, so decided to make the Richmond Church of God and the Canadian Cancer Society the object of his sponsorship; the first because of his close association with it since coming here in 1969, and the Cancer Society because his family lost wife and mother to that dread disease. Perhaps a unique feature of the sponsorship arrangement will be that any who contributes as sponsor will do so for the entire 4,000 miles, and people of different means can sponsor on different bases -- starting at 1/16¢ per mile, which is \$2.50 for the entire 4,000 miles; or 1/8¢ per mile and up -- 10¢, 20¢, etc.

Hope to realize up to \$40,000. for the Richmond Church which would help to make them debt free by the end of 1975. Hopes to keep sponsors informed by sending a News Letter every 1,000 miles.

H. V. ACKLAND