

Church, Colleges, and the Economy

By Dr. Merle D. Strege, *Historian of the Church of God*

Editor's Note: The bulk of this essay is extracted from the draft of a chapter in my forthcoming centennial history of Anderson University and is not to be reprinted or copied in any form other than this newsletter. This book will not be printed until sometime after 2017.

We often, and legitimately, think about the church almost exclusively in spiritual terms. It is our theological confession that the church, after all, is the body of Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit. And yet the church also lives in and with this world and its material conditions. So the church has found itself adapting to those "realities."

Despite their ecclesiology, early Church of God folk had to adapt to the demands of the United States Postal Service regarding incorporation if they wanted favorable postage rates. During World War II government rationing and restrictions on strategic materials forced churches to rethink meeting schedules and defer building plans.

Recently the US government announced that the "Great Recession" of 2009-10 has concluded, statistically speaking. Many remain unemployed and wonder when their personal recession will also come to an end. A year and more of hardship and uncertainty has reminded our oldest citizens of the severe economic dislocation of the Thirties. It was a trying moment in the history of the Church of God as well, especially for its fledgling academic institutions. Three schools were either founded or very young during the Great Depression, and the floundering economy wreaked destruction on one institution and severely tried the other two. Warner Memorial University closed its doors during the Thirties, and Anderson College and Pacific Bible College (now Warner Pacific College) barely survived. Here is a small glimpse at the manner in which Anderson managed to get through the Great Depression.

President John Morrison's correspondence was heavy with letters to students who had been forced to leave school. First, he urged them to return, if at all possible. If they could not, he played the part of collection officer and asked them to pay up their accounts. Morrison was willing to take any payment—even a dollar or two. (Warner Monroe left school in 1931 with an indebtedness of \$185. A resident of British Columbia, Monroe helped pay off his debt through the sales of a carload of telephone poles, a half acre of potatoes, and an acre and a half of cabbage.)

In order to begin the year, students were required to make a down-payment of \$100 (over \$4,100 in today's dollars). For those who lacked that amount, other arrangements could be made. For example, Anna Mae Anderson of Brooklyn, Illinois wished to return to school in the Fall of 1933. She owned a flock of 200 chickens which she believed would fetch a total of \$50 cash money. Morrison asked whether she might also have farm or garden produce to cover the balance; tuition payments in kind were welcome. As for Anna Mae's flock, Morrison wrote, "Let us hope that chickens will sell for a higher price by the time you dispose of yours."

In 1932, the college sponsored its first Harvest Festival, an event which became an annual occasion throughout the Depression and beyond. Goods of all kinds flowed in: dressed hogs; crates of eggs garden produce; fruit—canned and fresh; pillow cases and dresser scarves; bags of green beans, cabbage and flour; comforters, rugs, lima beans and popcorn. Harry Cleveland of Clare, Michigan sent potatoes, carrots, cabbage, two dozen two-quart jars of fruit and the promise of more if the college could provide additional jars.

The following letter from an Illinois supporter aptly summarizes the attitude and motives of many Depression-era donors.

Our family is fixing to send the college there at Anderson a small amount of canned fruit and we would like to know how you want it sent to make the expense as low as possible....We want it used there for the students. It isn't a large amount, but felt it would be pleasing to the Lord for us to send it.... And Bro. if it is possible for you to do so we would like to have the jars saved and if the Lord is willing we will be at the Anderson Campmeeting next June and call for the jars to refill again if we can for them.

The College struggled to pay faculty and staff members, whose salaries and wages were in arrears most of the decade. In 1931, faculty salaries were also reduced by 25% and some staff members were laid off. For most of the Depression, faculty members received only a small percentage of their salaries in cash. Many purchased groceries on credit at the store just across Fifth Street from Old Main. Owned and operated by Sam Bathauer, the store kept many college families in groceries during the worst of the Depression. Later, Bathauer simply forgave faculty debts to the store. (This story is eloquently told by Robert Reardon in the video *Holy Places*, Anderson, Covenant Productions 2005).

The story of Pacific Bible College's survival mirrors that of Anderson. It was only through the generosity of the Church, the faith and determination of administrators and faculty members, and the grace and patience of all that these schools survived.

Such virtues were also present among the good folk of Warner Memorial University, but there financial and enrollment disadvantages simply could not be overcome. Nonetheless, the story of college survival during the Depression serves to remind us of the need of certain virtues in hard times.

Holy Places is available in DVD or may be viewed on Youtube or Pinterest
<http://www.pinterest.com/andersonuniv/holy-places-tour/>

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